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Libya assails U.N. chief's stand

NICOSIA (R) — Libya criticised U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, saying his call for reconsidering a U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism was strange and unjustified. "The secretary-general's new stand can only be interpreted as complete bias towards the Zionist enemy... and a failure of his role as a neutral official in the United Nations," the official Libyan news agency JANA said in a commentary. The U.N. chief said Tuesday that rescinding a 16-year-old resolution on Zionism might create a better feeling in Israel about U.N. participation in a Middle East conference, Israel opposes a U.N. role in any Middle East peace conference, saying the organisation is biased against it. Arab states favour U.N. participation, JANA said Mr. Perez de Cuellar should work with the same enthusiasm on implementing U.N. resolutions on the Palestinian question. It said the international community was waiting for a U.N. move to implement the resolutions on Palestinian rights "even if by force, so that the Palestinian people could establish their state and live freely on their land."

Arafat urges Nathan to stop hunger strike

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israeli peace crusader Abie Nathan, in the 20th day of a hunger strike to protest a law against talking to Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leaders, said Friday he got a message from Yasser Arafat beseeching him to start eating. "But I won't give up," Mr. Nathan said. "Even if the president of Israel or President Bush asked me to stop I wouldn't. It's my life and I have my reasons." Mr. Nathan's hunger strike is aimed at rescinding a 1986 law which forbids contacts with groups that Israel considers "terrorist." Mr. Nathan, owner of the offshore "Voice of Peace" radio station, was jailed for four months in 1989 for meeting Mr. Arafat a year earlier. He faces trial for a second meeting. Contacted by telephone, Mr. Nathan said in a weak voice that he has lost 12 kilos during his water-only fast. He said a telefax signed by Mr. Arafat was sent to the Tel Aviv hotel where he has spent the hunger strike. "I am following in great appreciation your activities opposing the Israeli laws and measures that go against the genuine interests of our people, and peace and justice between the state of Palestine and Israel," Mr. Arafat wrote.

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Masri to visit Turkey Tuesday

ANKARA (R) — Foreign Minister Taher Al Masri will arrive in Turkey on Tuesday on a four-day official visit, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said Friday. Mr. Masri will discuss post-Gulf war developments in the region and bilateral ties with Turkish counterpart Ahmet Kucuktepe Alptemur, a ministry statement said.

Libyans flown to U.S. from Kenya

NAIROBI (R) — The United States said Friday it had flown 350 Libyans out of Kenya to new American homes but declined to comment on a report that they were the remnants of a force trained to overthrow Muammar Qaddafi. In a statement released by the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, the State Department said the men were former prisoners of war in Libya's southern neighbour Chad who feared persecution at home. It did not say when they were flown out. Friday's New York Times said the Libyans were part of a group of 600 who received guerrilla training from "American intelligence officials" during the 1980-88 Reagan presidency for an operation against Libya's leader that did not take place. The Libyans fled Chad last November, when Libya's ally Idriss Deby seized power there, and went to Zaire. Some decided to return to Libya but about 350 travelled to Kenya.

The Hague wants to expel Palestinian

THE HAGUE (AP) — The Dutch government is expelling a Palestinian labour activist considered a threat to national security, a justice ministry spokeswoman said Friday. Ibrahim Al Baz's permanent residency status was revoked six weeks ago after the ministry was alerted by the domestic security service to what spokeswoman Jannie Pols termed "dangerous" activities engaged in by Mr. Baz. She refused to elaborate on those activities, or how they endangered Dutch national security. Mr. Baz has filed an appeal with the justice ministry, which is due to be ruled on in two weeks, Ms Pols said. The 40-year-old Baz, who heads the General Union of Palestinian Workers, has been living in the Netherlands for 11 years and holds an Iraqi passport, the mass circulation daily The Telegraaf reported Thursday.

30 southern Sudanese killed in bombing

NAIROBI (AP) — Bombs dropped on a rebel-held southern Sudanese town killed more than 30 civilians, mostly women and children, in the single deadliest bombing since southern rebels took up arms eight years ago, a U.N. source said Friday. Eighteen bombs fell in and around the town of Nasir on Sudan's eastern border with Ethiopia Tuesday morning killing 27 people outright and wounding more than 20. Three more people died of their injuries on Nasir's small airstrip as they and 17 others waited to be evacuated by U.N. aircraft to a hospital run by the International Committee of the Red Cross in the northern Kenyan town of Lokichokki about 500 kilometres south, said a senior U.N. official. An unknown number of people died overnight, said the official.

Siad Barre 'would rather die fighting' than flee Somalia

ROME (R) — Mohammed Siad Barre, in hiding since rebels ousted him from power three months ago, has insisted he is still Somalia's legal president and pledged to die fighting rather than flee the country. "This is my country, my home. I will not go away, I will continue to fight to the death, even though I would like Somalia to solve their problems through dialogue," he said in an interview published Friday. He fled the capital Mogadishu in January after a month of street battles with rebels of the United Somali Congress, who have named an interim president.

Bush sees 'real cause for optimism' on peace

Israel says differences narrowed

WASHINGTON (Agencies) — President George Bush said Friday he still sees "real cause for optimism" on prospects for a Middle East peace conference and the U.S. effort to promote one will continue unabated despite apparent lack of progress. "My assessment... is that there is real cause for optimism and we will continue to work this process," Mr. Bush said in a brief conversation with reporters as he left for a weekend at the Camp David presidential retreat.

"We are not about to stop... progress has been made," said Mr. Bush, who refused to go into any detail on why he felt so optimistic about prospects of getting Israel, Arab states and Palestinians around a conference table. The president commented after being briefed by Secretary of State James Baker, who returned on Thursday night from his fourth Middle East shuttle-diplomacy mission since the Gulf war ended on Feb. 28.

Mr. Baker's trips to Israel, Syria, Jordan and in the region have apparently failed to resolve key differences blocking U.S. hopes of organising a peace conference covering all major Middle East issues. "We're going to keep on working it from here, and if there's a reason for him to go back (to the Middle East) we'll do it," Mr. Bush said.

He gave no details of the agreement, saying they would be outlined at a Saturday news conference. Mr. Barzani urged refugees who fled the fighting to return to northern Iraq. Tens of thousands of Kurds fled to the mountains to escape the rebellion in the wake of the Gulf war.

Allied officials said Friday they intend to build several more camps near Zakho in northern Iraq to house up to 100,000 Kurdish refugees on their way home. They plan up to five new temporary tent villages, each housing 20,000 refugees.

Coalition forces ran out of tents earlier this week but have found 35,000 tents at various locations around the globe, the Operation Provide Comfort task force said in a statement. The tents will be sent to Zakho. Mr. Barzani told an impromptu news conference at a Baghdad hotel that he was optimistic an agreement with the government would be signed soon. "We didn't reach full agreement, but we passed a very important step," Mr. Barzani said. "We agreed with the government about the main points of the democracy."

he will," Mr. Bush said as Mr. Baker stood by his side. Mr. Bush said "there's plenty of room for optimism."

He offered few details, except to point to a declaration by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states that they would send observers to a peace conference. Mr. Baker noted that all sides had agreed that the basis for any peace conference would be two United Nations resolutions calling for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories.

Said Mr. Bush: "Progress has been made and so when you're working a problem this complicated you just keep plugging away." Mr. Bush said quiet diplomacy is required to gain agreement on the peace conference, and added, "I think the credibility of the United States is higher in the Middle East than ever before."

He praised Mr. Baker's efforts lavishly — joking at one point that "it might kill him" if he had to undertake another trip to the Middle East. Mr. Baker returned home overnight without agreement from any of the key Middle East leaders for Mr. Baker's plan of a conference to be jointly sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union.

Israeli leaders said Mr. Baker had narrowed the gap between their position and that of the Arab states on Middle East peace talks but they refused to detail the progress made. "Mr. Baker is trying to reduce the gaps between us and the Arab states... my impression is that indeed a reduction has begun in those gaps," Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens, who participated in talks with Mr. Baker, told Israel Television.

Mr. Baker, who left Israel for Washington Thursday, said he was not disappointed at the end of his shuttle. But he confirmed that two issues — a possible conference role for the United Nations and the conference structure — were unresolved. Mr. Arens said he believed some progress had been made in the most recent talks with Mr. Baker but he refused to elaborate.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said Mr. Baker had secured agreement from the Jewish state on a number of issues, but he too refused to give details. "There is no failure here. We agreed on a lot of things that are not yet for publication, things that prepare the ground to allow Baker to make close and positive contacts with the partners that are taken into account in the peace campaign," he said. "I don't think that anyone should have expected any breakthroughs. The peace process in the Middle East is a very slow one, because most of the Arab states are not interested in making peace with Israel," Mr. Arens said on Thursday.

Asked if he included Syria in the list of "partners" the ground had been prepared for, Mr. Shamir said: "Everyone is on the list."

"I don't think that anyone should have expected any breakthroughs. The peace process in the Middle East is a very slow one, because most of the Arab states are not interested in making peace with Israel," Mr. Arens said on Thursday.

"We should be very satisfied when this slow process goes forward. And I think we are achieving slow advancement," he said. Mr. Arens said Israel was willing to go ahead even if Syria refuses to join the negotiating table.

After a lengthy session that stretched into the early morning hours, on official announcement in Damascus said Mr. Assad "welcomed the new and appropriate framework for the relations between the two states."

A presidential statement in Beirut said that on his return, Mr. Hrawi contacted Prime Minister Omar Karami and conveyed to him that he and Mr. Assad "were in total agreement on the details of the treaty."

Mr. Hrawi travelled to Damascus Thursday after his cabinet approved the draft treaty. The document has to be submitted to the Syrian and Lebanese parliaments for ratification before it becomes binding. The dates of the parliament sessions in Beirut and Damascus have not been set. But neither house is expected to challenge the presidents' decision.

Once ratified, it will be the first treaty to regulate relations between the two countries since Lebanon's independence from France in 1943. Syria maintains 40,000 troops in Lebanon under a 1976 Arab League peacekeeping mandate. It is backing Mr. Hrawi's drive to end 16 years of civil war and restore government authority to the country. Israel, which occupies a border strip in South Lebanon, rejected the accord between Lebanon and Syria.

King, Assad meet today on peace efforts

AMMAN (R) — His Majesty King Hussein is expected to fly to Damascus Saturday to discuss efforts to convene an Arab-Israeli peace conference with Syrian President Hafez Al Assad, Jordanian political sources said Friday.

"As main parties in the peace process, the two countries have to exchange views to know where each is standing vis-a-vis current peace efforts," one of the sources told Reuters. "The two also need each other's support in any future move in the peace process."

The King's trip to Syria follows U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's fourth tour of the region and after U.S. President George Bush called King Hussein on Wednesday to tell him that Washington was committed to an Arab-Israeli settlement based on U.N. principles demanding an exchange of land for peace.

Mr. Bush expressed "Washington's keenness and determination to help the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict to reach a peaceful political settlement on the basis of U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338," the Jordan News Agency, Petra, said. Political settlement on the basis of U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, King Hussein voiced Jordan's commitment to the cause of peace and to solving the Arab-Israeli and the Palestinian problems peacefully and justly on the principles of international legitimacy, it said.

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Syria, Lebanon enter treaty

BEIRUT (AP) — President Elias Hrawi returned home from Syria Friday after winning the support of President Hafez Al Assad for a treaty regulating "distinctive relations" between this war-ravaged country and its powerful neighbour.

But Israel strongly rejected the "treaty of brotherhood, cooperation and coordination," accusing Syria of "swallowing up" Lebanon. After a lengthy session that stretched into the early morning hours, on official announcement in Damascus said Mr. Assad "welcomed the new and appropriate framework for the relations between the two states."

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Israel, which occupies a border strip in South Lebanon, rejected the accord between Lebanon and Syria.

Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens said Friday Syria was "turning Lebanon into another protectorate."

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Mubarak: Gulf security proposal is not dead

CAIRO (AP) — President Hosni Mubarak says withdrawing Egypt's troops from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia does not mean that an eight-country Arab plan for Gulf security has collapsed.

He said Egypt will send troops to the Gulf again if a detailed agreement to be negotiated calls for them. Mr. Mubarak's remarks in an Italian television interview appeared intended to dispel interpretations that the Egyptian troop withdrawal marked the end of the so-called Damascus declaration.

Kuwait says allies will be out in 1 month

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait's defence minister said in an interview published Friday U.S.-led coalition forces would complete their pull out from the emirate within one month.

But Sheikh Ali Salem Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah said a joint force of the Gulf's six Arab states and Egypt and Syria would soon deploy in Kuwait. Sheikh Ali told the Kuwaiti newspaper Al Anba, published in Egypt, that "some 90 per cent of the American forces have withdrawn and the remaining numbers are pulling out."

After approximately one month these forces will complete their withdrawal as well as all of the coalition forces from Kuwait.

The minister said a force grouping troops from the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Egypt and Syria as well as some "friendly" countries would deploy in Kuwait. Sheikh Ali said a comprehensive agreement would then be reached regarding the security arrangements in the Gulf region. He said Iran would play a role in these arrangements. Western countries have said they would not keep ground troops in Kuwait but would maintain sea and air forces in the Gulf.

S. Arabia beefs up security for Haj

RIYADH (AP) — The Saudis are beefing up security for next month's annual pilgrimage to Islam's holiest shrines, fearing possible trouble from supporters of Iraq.

Officials declined to say how many troops and police will be mobilised for the month-long pilgrimage, the Haj, to the shrines at Mecca and Medina.

But a Western diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, noted: "I think this will be the largest number of security forces brought out for the Haj in its history."

The Saudis have a 45,000-man army and a 56,000-strong National Guard, including 26,000 tribal levies, which is controlled by the Interior Ministry.

As early as last month, a large number of regular police were transferred from Riyadh to Mecca, birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad. Bearded bedouin police from rural areas took their place.

The interior minister, Prince Nayif, warned last month that if there is trouble, "we will not show leniency in any case and we will not allow any individual to tamper with the security of the homeland."

The Haj has been plagued by violence and political problems for years and the Saudis have a lot riding on ensuring this pilgrimage will be trouble-free.

King Fahd, much of whose legitimacy in Islamic eyes rests on his title of guardian of the holy places, came under criticism in some parts of the Muslim World for inviting more than a half-million Western "infidel" troops into Saudi Arabia to protect it from Iraq.

Baghdad said Americans troops were defiling Mecca and Medina, the Prophet's burial place. But the Saudis largely countered that through a vigorous campaign of their own.

Nearly all the 700,000 Western Arab and Islamic troops who deployed in the U.S. coalition to liberate Kuwait, have gone home.

President Suharto of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation with an estimated 180 million people, has said he will personally make the Haj this year.

That was a signal of confidence in the Saudis and their security arrangements and a gesture towards Muslim unity.

The Haj, which all Muslims are expected to make at least once in their lives, is one of the world's largest religious rites.

An average of 1.6 million pilgrims from 60 countries converge on Mecca and Medina every year. Last year there were two million.

Iraqi Information Minister Hamid Yusef Hammadi said May 12 that Iraqi pilgrims will

take part in this year's Haj. But he gave no details and it's not clear how many Iraqis will come to Saudi Arabia this year.

The Saudis have never banned any Muslims from the pilgrimage, although after trouble with Iranian pilgrims in 1987, they imposed a quota system limiting national groups to 1,000 for every one million head of population.

Every year, the Saudis spend billions of dollars on facilities to accommodate, feed, transport and care for the flood of pilgrims.

This year they have spent additional funds on improving safety arrangements following a disaster last year in which 1,426 pilgrims died in a stampede in a Mecca tunnel.

Most were Indonesians, Turks and Malaysians. President Suharto's action in making the Haj himself was seen as endorsing the Saudi regime and its efforts to improve safety.

Violence and natural disaster have marred the Haj since 1979 when Sunni fundamentalists stormed the Grand Mosque. Scores of people were killed in a two-week siege.

Five years ago, Iranian Revolutionary Guards were arrested trying to smuggle explosives into Mecca. In 1987, more than 400 pilgrims, mostly Iranians, were killed in clashes with Saudi police when a banned political demonstration turned into a riot.

Two years later, bombs exploded in Mecca during the pilgrimage, killing one man and wounding others. Sixteen Kuwaiti Shiite Muslims, fingered as Iranian agents, were beheaded.

Despite the political feuds between Riyadh and other Arab groups, this year has seen a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

They restored relations last month, three years after Riyadh severed links, citing terrorism and subversion.

Since then, the Iranians have boycotted the pilgrimage, complaining that the quota system cut the number of Iranian pilgrims from 150,000 to 45,000.

The Saudis have allowed Iran to send 110,000 pilgrims this year — a reward, some say, for Iran's neutrality in the Gulf war.

But the return of the Iranians is one reason why the Saudis will be more alert this year.

While Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani is working to improve relations with his country's neighbours, he is opposed by radical fundamentalists who espouse overthrowing the Saudi royal family.

These radicals were considered behind much of the trouble in the past and the main Iranian opposition group, the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or people's holy warriors, claims sabotage operations are planned this year.

'Super bomb' used against Iraqis

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senior Iraqi military officers were the target of a powerful new bomb dropped by the U.S. air force on the final days of the Gulf war, an air force general has confirmed.

The existence of the non-nuclear bomb and its use against Iraqi bunkers near Baghdad was disclosed earlier this month by the magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology, which said the air force denied it was targeting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

General Ronald Yates, commander of air force systems command, told reporters inquiring about the use of the GBU-28 bomb that it was dropped on a single target, which he described as a command and control complex containing "senior staff" of the Iraqi military. He did not describe the extent of damage.

Gen. Yates, whose command was in charge of building the bomb, did not say whether the air force knew exactly which Iraqi military officials were in the bunker.

Last September during the U.S. military buildup in the Gulf, air force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Dugan was fired by Defence Secretary Dick Cheney for telling reporters that the air force would target the Iraqi leadership, including President Saddam, in an air war.

Gen. Yates, speaking at a breakfast meeting with defence reporters declined to elaborate further on the use of the GBU-28 bomb. He said "a classified number" of the bombs were built in the final days of the war, but he would not be more specific. The general would not say whether more of the bombs will be built.

To demonstrate how furiously the air force worked to get the bomb built, Gen. Yates said that when they were loaded for the trip to the Gulf in late February they were still warm from the molten explosive placed inside during assembly.

Aviation Week reported that the 2,130-kilogramme bombs were built in 17 days to meet a request from U.S. commanders for a weapon capable of penetrating Iraq's most heavily reinforced bunkers. The magazine said an undetermined number of Iraqi military officials were killed in the attack.

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Foreign Office told Briton given life spying sentence for in Iraq

LONDON (R) — The British government said on Friday it would exert maximum pressure on Baghdad to secure the early release of a British engineer sentenced by an Iraqi court to life imprisonment for spying.

Foreign Office Minister Douglas Hogg said the detention of Mr. Brand, Douglas Brand, was in breach of United Nations resolutions and that Britain would fight to keep economic sanctions in force against Iraq as long as he was held.

British officials said diplomatic sources in Baghdad had told London of Mr. Brand's trial and sentence but the Foreign Office was seeking urgent confirmation from the Iraqi authorities.

"We deplore this act. We think it's absolutely shocking," said Mr. Hogg.

"We will put all the pressure that we can on Iraq to get the early release of Douglas Brand," he told British Broadcasting Corporation television.

Britain's U.N. Ambassador Sir David Hannay said Thursday Mr. Brand was one of the hostages Iraq used as human shields to deter allied attacks before the Gulf war and that U.N. Secretary Council resolutions demanded he be freed.

Mr. Brand, 51, an engineer working in Iraq, was arrested while trying to flee through the south of the country last September, when Baghdad held thousands of Westerners and Japanese hostages following its seizure of Kuwait.

A Foreign Office spokesman said the life sentence in Mr. Brand's case appeared to mean 20 years, although spying can carry the death penalty in Iraq.

The death penalty was carried out in March 1990 on Mr. Farzad Bazoft, an Iranian-born journalist working for a British newspaper. He was hanged after being convicted of spying for Israel.

Mr. Hogg said British pressure on Baghdad could also include a refusal to support moves to ease U.N. sanctions against Iraq or to consider lifting a freeze on Iraqi assets in Britain.

"There are various things that we can do with regard to Iraqi assets here in London and also in regard to sanctions," he told BBC radio. "We shall be taking all possible steps."

Mr. Hogg called Mr. Brand's detention a "gross breach of various Security Council resolutions which require the release of all third country nationals held in Iraq."

Earlier on Friday, Mr. Hogg met Mr. Brand's son Andrew at the Foreign Office. After the meeting, Andrew Brand strongly denied his father was a spy.

"He was just an honest businessman earning a living on a purely commercial contract, not involved with the military in Iraq," he said in a television interview.

Mr. Andrew Brand said his father, a former royal marine and member of Britain's elite military Special Boat Squadron, was working for Iraq's Ministry of Irrigation and Dams, clearing the Shatt Al Arab waterway of debris from the Iran-Iraq war.

The Foreign Office contacted Iraq's sole diplomat in London, Charge d'Affaires Zuhair Ibrahim, on Thursday night after Soviet diplomats in Baghdad said Mr. Brand had been put on trial.

The Soviet diplomats said Mr. Brand was taken to court on Sunday from Abu Ghraib prison, west of the Iraqi capital, for what was apparently the first session of his trial for espionage.

Iraq broke diplomatic relations with Britain during the Gulf war and the Soviet Union has been representing British interests in Baghdad.

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Kuwait oil strategists wait for smoke to clear

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait's policymakers, peering at the inferno in their oilfields, concede that setting targets and mapping out production strategies must wait.

"It is like asking a man watching his house burning what colour he wants to paint his walls," said Nader Sultan, president of Kuwait Petroleum International.

The emirate hopes to start pumping oil next month for the first time since the U.S.-led allies ended Iraq's occupation in February. In the meantime, its pre-invasion production capacity of more than two million barrels per day is a memory.

"From one of the gathering centres (where the oil is separated from gas before being piped to the tank farms) we're hoping to guarantee 50,000 barrels (per day)," Mr. Sultan said in an interview with Reuters.

Refined products, which accounted for nearly 700,000 bpd of pre-invasion exports, will have to wait far longer to reappear. The complex refineries were reduced to a shambles in the Gulf war.

There are 26 gathering stations throughout Kuwait. All of them are believed to be damaged, some destroyed, but cannibalising parts could provide a short-term solution, U.S. oil industry sources said.

Some of the stations have still to be checked by experts. "We've been to the outer regions, but the American army has told us not to go even two inches off the tarmac," Mr. Sultan said.

The fear is mines. Driving south to Wafra on the Saudi border, row upon row of Iraqi mines are clearly visible, exposed by a northerly wind. A southerly wind will smother them with sand again just as soon.

One Kuwaiti oil executive said production would rise to 120,000 bpd in July, but "beyond that we cannot say, maybe another couple of hundred thousand."

"No dates are being set," Mr. Sultan said. "Ask anyone and technically they don't know when the fires will be extinguished," he said. But he added that according to comments made by firefighters, next year might see the cap put on the last flaming well.

Replacing destroyed equipment will also take time. The two main pipeline junctions, blasted apart by U.S. planes to stop oil spilling into the Gulf, will take more than a year to replace, one Kuwaiti oil executive said.

"Everything went through them," he added. Using by-pass pipes over the broken junctions will take crude oil to waiting tankers. But loading will be rudimentary and the volume significantly reduced until a replacement for the Sea Island terminal, also destroyed by U.S. planes, is ready.

Building a new terminal from scratch could take up to two years. The flows from the wells — more than 500 in the Greater Buroan field — were regulated to maintain a careful pressure balance between the subterranean layers of oil, gas and water.

Oil gushing at a rate of five million bpd drains the natural pressure of the reservoirs and threatens the lifespan of recoverable reserves estimated at 97 billion barrels.

Tell-tale white smoke billowing from a blown well means water has pushed to the top. One oil firefighter in the Ahmadi field, just south of Kuwait City, said he spotted only one well out of 100 in the area showing symptoms.

"No real work has been done to assess the damage to the reservoirs," Mr. Sultan said.

Soviet ties should enhance Saudi role

RIYADH (R) — Riyadh's improving ties with Moscow, after 50 years of mutual mistrust, should enhance Saudi Arabia's role in the politics of the post-Gulf war world, diplomats in the kingdom say.

The United States and the West European powers are welcoming the new Saudi-Soviet friendship as a force for regional stability, they say.

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia said last week that Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh's visit to Riyadh, the first by a leading Soviet politician since formal ties resumed last year, was a new departure in relations between the two countries.

Riyadh would prefer to see fewer Soviet Jews emigrating to Israel but the Saudis and Soviets generally agree on the means to peace between Arabs and Israelis, the diplomats say.

Mr. Bessmertnykh swung through the kingdom on his quest for a regional peace settlement, complementing a similar trip by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, but Saudi officials said after he left Riyadh Tuesday the Soviet minister's visit was as much to strengthen their new friendship.

"Saudi-Soviet talks concentrated on bilateral relations, which are based on a solid foundation, and these relations will expand," the Saudi Press Agency on Wednesday quoted Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal as saying.

"The Saudis are often a voice for moderation, and of particular importance through their economic power, but they have not often played an active role," said a European diplomat.

"Prince Saud realises that in order to have a more active diplomacy, Saudi Arabia needed to complete the circle with both superpowers, even if one is not quite the power it was," he said.

Saudi Arabia, the biggest and richest states on the Arabian Peninsula, was one of the last Gulf Arab countries to take up diplomatic ties with Moscow.

Since the 1980s, as a champion of Islam, Saudi rulers harboured a deep resentment of Moscow's imposition of communism on tens of millions of Soviet Muslims.

At first Moscow saw the kingdom as a playground for British imperial ambitions along its southern borders, connected to the old Anglo-Russian rivalry over the roads to British India.

After World War II, it increasingly saw it as a bastion of U.S. influence and the centre of Western control over the Gulf's huge oil reserves.

But the thaw in East-West ties over the past five years and President Mikhail Gorbachev's internal reforms persuaded the Saudis it was time to mend fences, the diplomats said.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia's ally and neighbour, last August also showed Riyadh it needed to adopt a more assertive regional and world diplomatic stance for the sake of its own security.

During Mr. Bessmertnykh's visit, Prince Saud thanked him for Soviet support for U.N. resolutions against Iraq, which gave the U.S.-led military alliance the authority to fight Iraq.

But the real breakthrough in Saudi-Soviet relations was Moscow's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988.

Saudi Arabia backed the Afghan guerrillas against the Soviet forces which supported the communist government in Kabul.

"Afghanistan put Saudi-Soviet ties on ice for 10 years. If not for Afghanistan, some Saudi leaders may have liked to see better relations earlier," said one diplomat.

Both sides have concrete things to offer. Saudi Arabia has the investment resources which the crippled Soviet economy needs.

In Moscow last November, Prince Saud began discussions on a \$4 billion credit for Moscow.

Moscow has also pleased Riyadh by recent concessions to religious freedom for Muslims. It has allowed in Saudi preachers and last year imported one million Saudi-printed copies of the Koran.

Visible Saudi patronage of Soviet Muslims is politically important because it helps Riyadh balance the influence of neighbouring Iran, which has fought a bitter campaign against Saudi Arabia for the title of protector of Islam, they said.

Late singer's daughter dies

CAIRO (AP) — Aicha Abdul Wahab, deeply distressed over the death of her father, Egypt's top composer-singer, died of a heart attack after watching one of his movies on television, family members said Friday. She was 46.

Doctors said Miss. Abdul Wahab died of a heart attack, just as her 90-year-old father Mohammad Abdul Wahab died two weeks ago.

She was the eldest of Abdul Wahab's five children by his first wife, who died a few years ago. He named Aicha after his mother, and family members said she was his favourite.

They said Miss Abdul Wahab suffered deep depression after her father's death. On the eve of her fatal attack on Tuesday, they said, she wept as she watched on television one of the seven movies in which Abdul Wahab starred.

Abdul Wahab, universally acknowledged as the Arab World's most popular composer-singer this century, died on May 3 and was given a military funeral.

Barzani reports accord

(Continued from page 1)

ing his hotel with Kalashnikov automatic rifles hidden behind newspapers.

Issues resolved included an end to strife in the north, the KDP leader said.

Mr. Barzani said another key issue, control of the northern city of Kirkuk and its vast oil resources, was now "not a problem."

Another Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani, told Reuters on Tuesday the Kurds would accept Baghdad's control of the oil in return for Kurdish administration of Kirkuk and its province.

Mr. Talabani said instead of a slice of the oil revenues, the Kurds wanted a share of the state budget equal to their population — about 20 per cent to Iraq's 18 million people.

Mr. Barzani said he was confident Iraq was ready to sign an agreement with the United Nations to provide some kind of U.N. security presence in the Kurdish region.

Bush sees 'real cause' for hope

(Continued from page 1)

"I don't think it's impossible to advance the peace process without Syria," he said. "There are other countries bordering Israel, Jordan of course... we are prepared and interested in making peace with all of them together... and even with just one."

The English-language Jerusalem Post daily, meanwhile, quoted a political source as describing a series of secret agreements reached in Mr. Baker's talks with the Israeli leaders this week.

Mr. Shamir disclosed Thursday that Israel and the United States "agree on a number of issues that cannot be published yet" to help Mr. Baker's peace drive.

According to the Post, the agreements included one saying the European Community would have a "clearly defined and limited" role in the conference.

Although Mr. Shamir refused any U.N. role at the conference, final documents would be submitted to U.N. headquarters in New York, the newspaper said. Israel army radio reported Thursday that the United Nations will put a "final stamp of approval" on any Arab-Israeli agreements.

Israel also agreed to use only the term "conference," an apparent compromise between the Arabs' call for an "international" meeting and Israel's proposed "regional" conference.

In another development, the Arab-language daily Al Nahar reported "important signs that Israel and Palestinians in the occupied territories have agreed to what Baker said is a three-year self-rule before negotiating the final status of the occupied territories."

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said Friday he believed a Middle East peace conference could be agreed before the end of this year.

Mr. Mubarak is on a European trip. "I don't think Baker's mission is a failure. The problem of the Middle East is so complicated that it will not be solved in one or two trips," Mr. Mubarak told a news conference after talks with Luxembourg leaders.

"But I think there are good steps forward now and I think I hope that we can conclude something before the end of this year."

He said concessions would have to be made but avoided singling out Israel.

"I hope all the parties would respond to the words of peace... without concessions peace will never prevail."

Mr. Mubarak said he was willing to have bilateral talks with the Israeli leader if they would be productive.

"A meeting between me and Mr. Shamir at such a sensitive time should be worked out beforehand," he told reporters at Luxembourg's Senningen Castle.

"If there is good preparation something will come out of the meeting. If nothing comes out, this will be a setback that will create a lot of problems."

Lebanon

(Continued from page 1)

broadcast by the state-run Radio Lebanon, said the war games in the security zone "appear to be a threat against the treaty (with Syria)."

The Lebanese media published Friday the text of the six-point treaty.

The first two clauses deal with cooperation and coordination in various fields, especially economic, education, trade and foreign policy.

The next three points deal with security arrangements, including a plan for redeployment of the Syrian troops. The final clause calls for the establishment of a body headed by the presidents of the two countries to oversee implementation of the accord.

The treaty was the latest step in a government drive to accelerate a peace process under a 1989 Arab League-brokered accord to end the civil war.

Lebanon has already disarmed rival militias in and around Beirut and deployed government troops to control a 2,500-square-kilometre strip, or one fourth of the country.

The peace plan calls for deployment throughout the rest of the country as of July 1.

Home News

Masri praises positive Arab climate in Cairo

AMMAN (Petra) — Foreign Minister Taher Al Masri said Thursday the meeting of the Arab League's Council in Cairo yielded positive results and took place in a friendly atmosphere, which ran against all expectations in the light of the current Arab situation and rifts in Arab ranks.

In a telephone interview with Radio Jordan from Cairo, Mr. Masri said he felt in speeches delivered by heads of the Arab delegations in the meeting that the Arab states are trying to create a new atmosphere in the Arab region.

"Everyone (in the meeting) talked about Arab agreement and Arab unity, as well as a review of former concepts, so that we set out with Arab action to new grounds," the foreign minister said.

But, Mr. Masri said, the Arabs should wait to see if this trend of change will be transformed into deeds that will have their effects on the Arab atmosphere and inter-Arab relations.

He said the discussion of several important issues was postponed till the Cairo-based Arab League Council's next session in order to give time to the newly-elected secretary general of the Arab League, former Egyptian Foreign Minister Esmat Abdul Meguid, to make contacts and visit Arab states to try to solve inter-Arab differences.

"We should admit that the atmosphere revealed some language in relations, thus it was not possible to discuss some hot issues or basic political matters of interest to the Arab World," he said.

"We thought it was suitable to give the new secretary-general of the Arab League, Dr. Abdul Meguid, the opportunity to settle differences and to prepare the ground for a better atmosphere for the next (Arab League's Council) session."

The minister said during his stay in Cairo he held several meetings with Arab foreign ministers taking part in the meeting and met with Dr. Abdul Meguid to discuss the Arab League's next moves and the role of the general secretariat.



His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan Thursday confers with the Soviet delegation here for talks on cooperation, Middle East issues (Petra Photo)

Parents debate education minister's controversial decision, vow to fight it until rescinded

By Nur Sati
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Following last month's decision by minister of education to ban all fathers from attending their daughters' sports activities, angry parents have formed a committee to tackle the minister's measure.

One-hundred and fifty parents met recently, under the chairmanship of eight elected committee members, to voice anger over the minister who "is trying to take our freedom and rights," preferring anonymity, parents argued that "the father and mother have a right to discuss the decision because we are the ones to determine the education policy that we want for our children."

The committee members "consider the decision as a unilateral one because the minister did not consult other members of parliament."

All parents from private schools said they would work together to counter the latest decision. A petition will be prepared and signed by all private school parents. "We will send this petition to the prime minister or the King," said one of the eight committee

members who preferred to have the meeting and names of participants anonymous.

The meeting was characterized by heated debate and tough questions: "Is this (new measure) of any use to the education of our children?"

The parents will be campaigning strongly against the decision. "We believe, as an educational institution, that there are certain ways of teaching and developing children: it should be done in a healthy manner," one father asserted.

The Education Minister, Dr. Abdullah Akaleh, on April 30, imposed a measure which would ban fathers from watching girls in gym slips compete in school sports.

Dr. Akaleh said that, "this would allow girls total freedom to display their skills without embarrassment."

When a young girl asks her father to come and watch her at school, and the father says no, the girl will grow up with a complex, no doubt, many parents said.

Parents' reaction towards the minister's decision was unanimous. It is wrong, they said.

"We do not want to attack or change people's points of view, but we do not want this measure to be forced upon us either," said a mother.

Many parents saw this as a social problem, others thought it was purely an educational one. "There is so much to be done in the educational system. Students are studying from books that are ten years old. Why does the minister concentrate on issues such as banning fathers from watching their daughters when an overhaul of the educational system is more important?" asked one of the more outspoken fathers.

The meeting decided to gather all parents from private schools to campaign against the law, which many believe will affect the educational system, and to try rescind the decision.

In the meeting those parents attending said they would speak out and send petitions until the minister's decision is cancelled. "We will keep arguing against it because we feel it has nothing to do with education."

Iraqis trickle into Jordan after ban on travel lifted

By Rana Sabbagh
Reuters

AMMAN — Lucky Iraqi holidaymakers, most enjoying their first taste of foreign travel in almost a decade, are trickling into Jordan to escape the deprivations of war at home.

"I cannot believe I made it," said Ghazwa Shawqi, 38, a secretary who arrived on one of the air-conditioned Jordanian buses which run a daily 1,000-kilometre desert shuttle between Amman and Baghdad.

"The (Gulf) crisis has made our life hellish," Shawqi said, scrambling for her luggage tucked under dozens of other suitcases. "I need to rest and feel I am still alive."

President Saddam Hussein lifted a ban on foreign travel two days ago as part of efforts to normalise life after Iraq's Gulf war defeat by the U.S.-led allies in February.

A travel ban during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war was lifted briefly last year then reimposed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2.

Jamila Jaloul, 26, travelling outside Iraq for the first time, said many families she knew would try to leave after May 25, when school examinations are over.

"All my friends want to come to Jordan because it is the only place where they are allowed in with no complications and do not feel humiliated as Iraqis," she said. "Amman is also one of the few places where you can exchange Iraqi dinars."

Iraqis travelling abroad are allowed to take only 25 dinars (\$130 at official rates, but a mere \$4 at black market rates) out of the country, effectively limiting foreign travel to those with outside bank account.

Jordan's hotels, whose tourist trade took a direct hit during the Gulf crisis because most Jordanians sympathised with Baghdad, hope the Iraqis will revive their fortunes.

"We expect a boom soon," said Ghaleb Sawalha, executive director at the five-star Regency Palace Hotel.

But Jaloul's businessman husband Jassim said: "At the rate things are going, I don't believe many people will be able to leave before two weeks."

"Many people either have no passports because they could never travel during the war with Iran or have expired travel documents which need renewal. Others are standing in queues to get exit visas," he added.

"I have a current account in a Jordanian bank but many others do not and are looking for ways to ensure they have enough money to cover their stay abroad. No one can live on the amount he is allowed to take out."

The hopes of many less well-off Iraqis for an escape from political and economic turmoil were dashed by strict guidelines announced by the government last week.

Apart from currency restrictions, Iraqi men cannot leave if they are still eligible for conscription. Government workers need written permission.

Abstract art exhibition — a symbol of daily life

By Maha Addasi
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Currently on display at the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation are the works for two Jordanian artists, Ahmad Nawash and Yasser Dweik.

The exhibition, which opened on May 5, is entirely made up of abstract art but each artist uses a different medium.

Mr. Nawash's technique is mostly etching, with acids in different concentrations used to draw on different media. Mr. Nawash uses zinc, which is the usual material for etching, but also copper and stone, which differ in the texture and therefore give various background colours.

Mr. Nawash also has lithographs on display. All have figures depicting a theme related to daily life morals.

In one etching Mr. Nawash's figures are combined giving the impression that all three figures in the frame have the same body. If one looks closely, though, one notices that if each head is covered at a time the rest of the etching shows either an animal or a human-like figure.

According to the artist, this etching symbolises how humans and animals share the burdens in life.

In another lithograph the figure of an innocent child dominates the frame. The child, representing a Palestinian

child, shows deep sorrow. To the left of the frame is an older man, with an eye patch, clearly depicting Moshe Dayan, is drawn so that he appears tiny in comparison to the child. The man's expression is that of extreme wickedness.

Yasser Dweik's works are abstract studies of squares. All the pictures are square shaped and many are in turn out into the smaller squares. This way the picture contained several mini-pictures which have the same general theme but can also be looked at as individual pieces.

Mr. Dweik presents a great deal of his art through geometric shapes and colours. In one of his works Mr. Dweik shows the outer squares in a somber colour framing four squares in vivid blue and bright white colours. The inner square are reminiscent of a clown-filled sky.

In another work, the four inner squares look like they could be photographs of cells as seen under a microscope.

In yet a third etching, the inner four squares show the same colours that are on the 12 outer squares but they look like photographs out of focus.

The highlight of Mr. Dweik's works is one showing hands reaching out in every direction. All the hands are stretched as far as they can reach as though ready to grab something that is rightfully theirs.

The exhibition will continue until June 5.



PRINCE MOHAMMAD VISITS MECHANISED DIVISION: His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad, the personal representative of His Majesty King Hussein, Thursday visited one of the formations of the 4th Royal Mechanised Division where he was received by the division and unit commanders and senior Armed Forces officers. Prince Mohammad was briefed by the unit commander on the duties assigned to his unit.

Division where he was received by the division and unit commanders and senior Armed Forces officers. Prince Mohammad was briefed by the unit commander on the duties assigned to his unit.

Zarqa governor urges setting up fund for environment protection

ZARQA (Petra) — Zarqa Governor Mohammad Hussein Shobaki Friday called for undertaking studies on the feasibility of using water from Zarqa River for irrigation purposes, and proposed the establishment of a fund to protect the environment. The fund will be financed by the various companies and factories in the governorate.

Mr. Shobaki stressed the need to address the issue of pollution, mainly bacterial, organic and from soluble pollutants, and called on companies and factories to set up special purification plants to treat liquid waste before dumping it.

Such treatment plants, he said, are badly needed to avoid the hazards that polluted waste poses to the life of people, animals and to the soil, and to enable the utilisation of treated water for industrial or agricultural purposes.

He also requested owners of factories and companies to connect their factories to the main sewerage network, after prepar-

ing the necessary specification and undertaking lab tests for samples of water on a daily basis.

The governor noted that the Public Safety Committee in Zar-

qa has drawn up various plans, in cooperation with the parties concerned, to safeguard the environment in the area adjacent to the Zarqa River.

VACANCY FOR BOOKKEEPER/ACCOUNTANT American Employees Community Service Association May 6, 1991

The American Employees Community Service Association (AECSA) will take applications beginning May 19, through May 30, for a bookkeeper/accountant.

Applicant must:

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Attn: Administrative Office.

Arab-Soviet dialogue ends, stresses need for peace conference, reviews ties

AMMAN (J.T.) — A two-day Arab-Soviet dialogue, which focused on issues ranging from the Middle East question to Soviet-Arab economic cooperation, ended in Amman Thursday evening, and the five-member Soviet delegation left for home Friday.

Wounding up the visit, the Soviet delegation's leader Professor Mikhail Kapitsa announced that his country was determined to pursue all efforts to maintain the traditional ties with the Arab region.

At a meeting with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, following the final session, Prof. Kapitsa called on world nations to show better understanding of the issues of the Middle East and to help the people of this region establish security and stability.

Prince Hassan expressed hope that close cooperation and a comprehensive dialogue between the Arabs and the Soviet Union would continue in an atmosphere of understanding and positive openness to serve the interests of the two sides.

Addressing the meeting, at Al Hussein Youth City and attended by all delegates participating in the dialogue, the Crown Prince emphasised the importance of upholding the international legitimacy, which, he said, should be manifested through the implementation of U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 to ensure a lasting settlement to the Middle East problem.

Prince Hassan said that the Middle East was now passing through a crucial stage that was bound to affect its future political, social and economic life.

He urged concerned parties to maintain dialogue among the countries involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, between the Palestinians and the Israelis and among nations of the Middle East region along the principles of the Helsinki Agreement which charted cooperation among European nations.

The Arab-Soviet dialogue, which was organised in Amman by the Arab Thought Forum (ATF), issued a statement noting

that the participants have reviewed working papers dealing with peace in the Middle East, disarming the region, ways to bolster Arab-Soviet economic cooperation and means of ensuring security for the region.

According to the statement, the participants agreed that massing of military arsenals in the region constituted a source of danger not only for the Arabs but the whole region and world peace.

The participants voiced total support for the idea of holding a peace conference to ensure a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestine problem, based on U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, said the statement.

Matters related to future economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and various Arab countries were all discussed in-depth during the two-day dialogue.

The participants decided to hold the fifth Arab-Soviet dialogue in Cairo next year.

Labour federation criticises employers of non-Jordanians

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Federation of Jordanian Labour Unions (FJLU) Friday voiced strong criticism of the employers and owners of various businesses employing non-Jordanian workers and said that they were trying to find a way around the labour regulations with the purpose of keeping the non-Jordanian workers.

The Federation's Secretary General Abdul Halim Khaddam told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that only a limited favourable response was displayed by the employers with regard to the recent Labour Ministry's measures to find work for Jordanians, and many of the employers were trying to find a way around the regulations without giving due consideration to the national interests.

Mr. Khaddam's accusations followed a spate of measures conducted by the Labour Ministry to find work for thousands of workers seeking employment through stimulating the activities of the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), which has prepared training programmes for the job-seekers.

Mr. Khaddam said that the new law provided protection to the Jordanian Workers, giving them immunity against arbitrary dismissal from private sector in-

sistencies, and backed the workers' just causes.

He said that the law covered workers not only in the factories and institutions, but also on the farms, and provided for the workers' rights to organise unions.

In addition, the new labour law limits the minimum wages for workers through specialised committees representing the government, the employers and the workers, Mr. Khaddam said.

He said that the new labour law was needed to cater to the new development in the labour market and for the sake of controlling the Jordanian labour market. "It is needed to give the workers new legislations catering to the new democratic life which offers more liberties to the Jordanian people, including the freedom of forming new trade unions," Mr. Khaddam added.

Mr. Khaddam urged employers and businesses to respond favourably to the Labour Ministry's measures concerning employment and said that his federation was willing to cooperate with them with the purpose of safeguarding national interests.

47 killed on the roads in April

AMMAN (J.T.) — A total of 47 people were killed and 791 others injured in 2,061 road accidents which occurred in Jordan in April, according to a statistical bulletin issued by the Public Security Department (PSD).

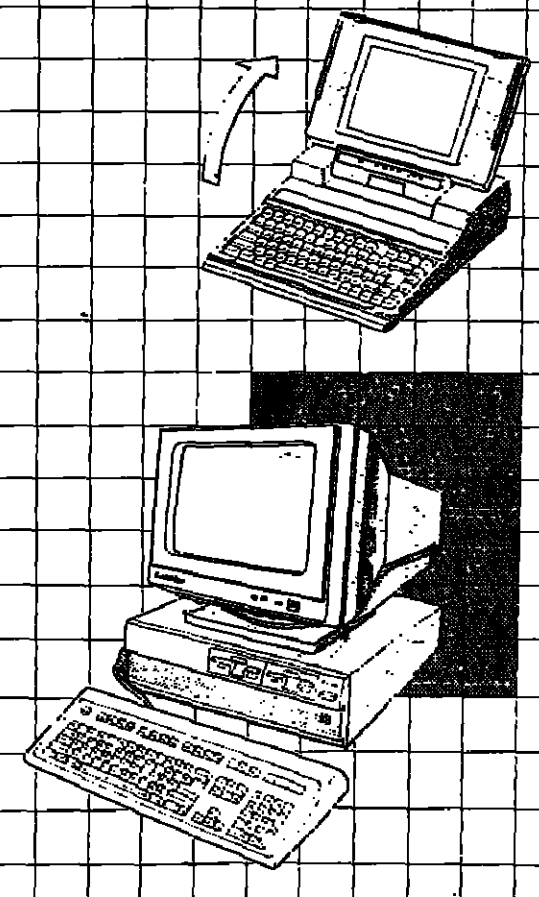
These accidents registered an increase of 237 over those of March, 1991, and an increase in the number of dead by 18, although the number of injured people dropped by 34, the bulletin noted.

According to the bulletin, 239 vehicles were involved in the past month's accidents. Amman registered the highest number of accidents, 1,264, resulting in the death of 18 citizens and the injury of 315.

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MAHMOUD AL KAYED

Director General:
MOHAMMAD AMAD

Editor-in-Chief:
GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

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Real pictures from a good old town

TELEVISION regaled us a few days ago with pictures of Crown Prince Hassan's field trip to Zarqa and his mingling with labourers, officials and good old citizens going about their work and doing their shopping in the marketplace. Beyond the happy expression of meeting their Crown Prince in casual clothes and near their homes, however, Zarqa residents must have found the visit important on at least two counts: First, Zarqa is the second biggest city in the country yet it is one of the most impoverished and neglected among its sister towns. Second, for His Royal Highness to go there now, having visited there not so long ago, means that if the government has forgotten about their ordeal, not everybody who counts has. That Zarqa and Zarqans epitomise the malaise of the Kingdom is a foregone conclusion. The plight of the Zarqa residents is readily noticed upon even the most superficial visit, not to mention an in-depth tour as the one carried out by Prince Hassan on Monday.

Unemployment here is rampant, city planning is at its worst and social problems abound. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that if there was discontent and despair in the Kingdom, Zarqa would be the foremost sufferer from such ills. To get acquainted with Zarqa's misfortunes at the level of the Crown Prince offers, therefore, some good opportunities to get the pulse of the country's neglected citizens at close range. The Maan eruption of 1989 need not occur again as a prelude to initiate remedial actions that may serve as preventive medicine for any simmering disorders in the country. Only by identifying the woes of the people and moving to address them immediately would the government be in a position to assess local and civic problems and undertake to rectify them. What is especially wise and important about Prince Hassan's field trip to Zarqa is the lesson that ought to be learned about governor and governed staying in touch with each other and consolidating communication between them. There is every hope that others especially government ministers and senior officials would follow in the footsteps of the Prince in this endeavour provided they do so with faithful intent to come to grips with the demands and rights of the public rather than aim for a public relations score.

Needless to say, such intimate contact with the people of the Kingdom is a symbol of democracy. In this vein, few parliamentarians have really bothered to mix with the citizens of their respective constituencies on any scale resembling real political life. Likewise, seldom does one see politicians hit the streets to rub shoulders with the masses in any impressive way. The Prince's Zarqa tour is therefore a signal to all concerned that such field trips deserve to be undertaken regularly and frequently.

The people of Zarqa as elsewhere in the country expect action-oriented measures to remedy their difficulties where they exist. But before that, it is always useful for government representatives to go and see things as they are on the ground, not just hear about them from the comfort of their offices in Amman.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i Arabic paper Friday discussed Israel's continued obstinacy with regard to the implementation of U.N. resolutions; and stressed that the responsibility should be squarely placed on the United States which had assumed the task of implementing the international legitimacy. The credibility of the United States and President Bush and his administration now lie hostage to the Zionist attitude and it is up to Washington now to find out whether it should remain captive to the world Zionism and risk losing all credibility or take active steps to free itself and free this region from the atmosphere of war and terrorism, said the paper. World Zionism is seeking to abort Washington's endeavours to reach peace in the region and it is diving to show the world that the United States is capable of launching war like that in the Gulf but incapable of making peace anywhere in the world, noted the paper. Of course Israel saw in Washington's war on Iraq a chance to pursue its own war on the Arabs and to maintain its expansionist policies in Arab land, but by so doing it is placing the U.S. administration face to face with the moment of truth, the paper added. The daily urged Egypt to join forces with the United States to force Israel to comply with the international legitimacy and implement U.N. resolutions instead of blaming the United States for failing to exercise pressure on Israel. Egypt, said the paper, is the only Arab country linked to the Jewish state through a peace treaty and Egypt's political weight should now be utilised so that a lasting peace can be achieved.

A columnist in Al Ra'i daily criticises U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar for condemning a U.N. General Assembly resolution, equating Zionism with racism. There is a big similarity between the Zionists who occupy Arab land, kill innocent people, detain thousands others, demolish homes and evict civilians from their homeland in the occupied Arab lands and their counterparts in South Africa, says Tareq Masarweh. Through his long service at the United Nations, de Cuellar should have come to realise these facts. De Cuellar considers the General Assembly resolution as impeding peace; but he does not consider Israel's continued occupation of parts of Syria, Palestine and Lebanon and the annexation of Jerusalem and the atrocities committed by the Zionists as obstructing all paths leading to peace, says the writer. If de Cuellar is sympathetic towards the Iraqi Kurds, why is he indifferent towards the Palestinian Arabs who are exposed to repression? asks Masarweh. The writer considers de Cuellar's statements as un-ethical and do not conform to the spirit of the U.N. charter and the universal declaration of human rights. He condemns the statements as coming from a man who has transformed himself as a tool in the U.S.-Israeli hand.

VIEW FROM AMMAN

What are the characteristics of new world order?

COMING in the wake of the Gulf war, the first signs of the new world order are ominous indeed; begotten by violence unequal in historical annals not only in its intensity but fierceness and swiftness as well. Was the lesson only for Iraq? What was the lesson designed to achieve? The calming of nerves of certain jittery mini-states with look-alike armies or does it have wider implications?

If one of the characteristics of the new world order then is violence, the second is the monopoly of that violence by the one superpower and its partners. In his 1991 state of the union message President Bush proclaimed before the United States Congress "... we are Americans. We have a unique responsibility to do the hard work of freedom." Mr. Bush, however, did not elaborate on whose freedom he was talking about. In January the president stated: "When we win — and we will — we will have taught a dangerous dictator, and any tyrant tempted to follow in his foot steps, that the U.S. has a new credibility and that what we say goes..."

What these two statements declare is that the United States already views itself as the guarantor of the security of the coming world order. Couching its intentions in language that claims moral ascendancy does not hide the real underlying intentions. Had the United States track record been different in Latin America, the Caribbean and indeed elsewhere, one would be tempted to believe the rhetoric.

The problem for us in the Arab World has been compounded by the fact that the United States continues to deal with two measures. It's double standard vis-a-vis the Palestinian problem and its constant demurring before Israeli — Zionist pressure have been major causes for the continued condition of chaos and hopelessness in the Arab World. And while no one any longer concerns himself with the Arab mini-leaders, the U.S. patronises, or with the fact that it has effectively become in control of oil, some concern remains that the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to go on festering.

Many Arabs, aware that due to internal as well as external reasons the Arab World cannot at the moment aspire to a loftier status, have no opinion regarding a unipolar world and might, should the U.S. achieve an equitable peace settlement of the Palestine problem, become its supporters. There is no enmity between Arab and American per se. In fact, no Arab and American soldiers faced each other in active combat except in Barbary wars and recently in the Gulf war. A unipolar world, with a single unified will, and should it truly deal with one

measure, might be preferable to the utter confusion, conflict and rivalry that has been the condition of international relations since the dawn of history.

The fear in the Arab World, as indeed in the rest of the Third World, is that there will be more than one measure, and that the justice that will prevail will be that of the jungle, of the strong imposing its will on the less fortunate.

What the world needs right now is not merely lofty declarations, but assurances regarding what is to come. Since the United States advanced the idea, it is the United States that must explain it. The fear outside the United States is real. Writing in a Mexican daily, commentator R. U. Iniesta says, "... the justice of the 'new order' already has exhibited a pattern of action against anyone who does not submit to the U.S. president..." President Mitterrand of France says, "no one can claim that from now on one country decides for all." Prime Minister Mahatir Mohammad of Malaysia adds, "... people now live in fear of the U.S., believe me... if you are friendly with the U.S., that is fine. But if you annoy them, they can take action like they did in Panama. There is no more Russia you can turn to."

The saddest aspect of the matter between the Arabs and the Americans is that no one is truly annoying the latter any way. What is needed is not more rhetoric but genuine actions taken by the U.S. to reassure the world of its intentions: A new credibility. What is just as needed is for the U.S. to free itself from the tentacles of Zionist influence so it can truly become credible and work towards the achievement of the principles it preaches to the world.

Thus far, the new world order advanced by the U.S. remains terra incognita to the rest of the world: a shadowy land more jungle than anything else.

The world appears to be — whether we like it or not — on the doorsteps of something new. Not only the coming of the twenty-first century, but the chance to aspire to achieve a new world: a new world that is built truly on mutual respect, partnership and a share in humanity; and not a world that is haunted by the real or imaginary prejudices of the past including the shadowy influence of Zionism.

That is why it is not acceptable to hear someone like U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger say of the new world "...I cannot describe to you what the new world order ought to look like..." If you don't know, what then are you proposing or indeed imposing?

Gulf war leaves world economic outlook muddier

By Rick Gladstone
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Nearly three months after allied forces evicted Iraq's army from Kuwait, skepticism has tinged predictions of a postwar economic renaissance, led by a spiritually renewed United States.

A recession that the U.S. government now acknowledges began last summer shows little evidence of ending and is flashing some troublesome signals of worsening.

If anything, some forecasters say, the Gulf war and its aftermath have muddled the world's economic waters.

"The invasion of Kuwait didn't start the recession, so the end of the war didn't end it," said Audrey Freedman, an economist at the Conference Board, a New York business-research group.

The economic news is not all bad. Leading indicators charted by the U.S. government have shown improvement, and consumer confidence indexes are up. But the promise of recovery still outweighs the evidence so far.

One private assessment produced by the Conference Board shows weakness spreading rapidly and deeply across the global economy. Its composite leading index of major industrialised nations, which projects future economic conditions, fell at an annual rate of four per cent in April, compared with a two per cent drop three months earlier and two per cent growth six months ago.

Economists say a number of problems have conspired to cause a powerful worldwide slowdown, which not only predated the war but in some respects has grown more intense.

Highly indebted Third World nations owe more money than ever, and with few exceptions are all in decline, partly because of the flooding they took from higher energy prices following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Eastern Europe, barely a year ago a fertile field of opportunity for western investors, is reeling backward, starved for capital and wracked by unemployment and inflation.

The Soviet economy itself has largely collapsed, making frustrated westerners more wary about doing business there.

Powerhouse Germany is suffering indignation over the unification of Communist east and capitalist west. Japan's mighty economy has slowed and its long-standing trade feud with the United States has grown testier.

In the Gulf region itself, the enormous cost of rebuilding from the war will suck billions of investment dollars away from other areas.

As for the United States, new jobless claims and layoffs are rising, while factory orders and auto sales fall. Government fi-

gures show the economy contracted at an annual rate of 2.8 per cent in the first quarter.

Some of the United States' best-known corporations have reported large first-quarter losses and seem reluctant even to speculate on when improvements will be seen.

"This is a time of extraordinary demands on our business," said General Motors Corp. Chairman Robert Stempel in assessing GM's \$-1.1 billion first-quarter loss.

Borrowed money still permeates the economy at all levels, ranging from credit card bills to state budget gaps to the federal debt, which is hurtling towards \$3.5 trillion, nearly quadruple the level of a decade ago.

Money that could go for jobs, capital spending, education and research goes instead to pay interest on loans or help bail out the savigs and loans and banks

Against such odds, there's doubt the United States can borrow its way out of recession as it has done in previous downturns. Foreigners who sell goods and services in the U.S. market will suffer, weakening their economies and eventually eroding their ability to buy what America produces.

"When a country goes into recession, that means spending declines, not just on domestic goods but imported goods," said Keith Johnson, a senior economist at Morgan Guaranty Trust Co., a large New York bank. "Since imported goods are produced abroad, it affects economic growth abroad."

Hopeful signals are flashing from some corners, however. The stock market, for example, which has a respectable record of pre-sagging recessions and recoveries, has been rallying. The Dow Jones industrial average, the best-known barometer of Wall Street, hit an all-time high of 3,004.46 on April 17.

Home sales show some evidence of stirring from a prolonged coma. Inflation seems to be receding, partly because the end of the war erased the threat of sharply higher energy prices. Surveys of consumers who hibernated during the war have suggested they're more confident in the future.

The Bush administration believes the economy is about to turn around. The president himself, seeking a catalyst for growth, has exhorted bankers to lower the cost of borrowing in this country, and the Federal Reserve, the nation's central bank, has cooperated by engineering lower interest rates.

Bush also has pushed free trade with Mexico, one of the few expanding Latin economies, as part of a grand plan to stimulate economic activity throughout North America.

New Arab league chief is a believer in quiet diplomacy

By Munir Boweti
Reuters

CAIRO — Esmat Abdul Maguid, elected secretary general of the 21-member Arab League on Wednesday, is a tough negotiator who believes in quiet diplomacy.

A lawyer turned diplomat, Abdul Maguid, 68, was Egypt's United Nations ambassador when he retired in 1983 after a long diplomatic and government career. Months later president Hosni Mubarak called him out of retirement to become foreign minister.

Abdul Maguid favours close ties with the United States and upholding Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel. He took part in the U.S.-sponsored negotiations that produced the treaty, the only one between Israel and an Arab country.

He is also known to support Palestinian calls for self-determination including statehood.

Born into a well-to-do family in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria in 1923, he obtained a doctorate in international law in Paris in 1951 and was twice ambassador to France.

He was chosen for his first negotiating role as a member of the Egyptian delegation negotiating British evacuation from the Suez Canal. The talks led to the 1954 Anglo-Egyptian agreement.

Abdul Maguid is married with three sons.

Abdul Maguid was then head of the United Kingdom desk at the foreign ministry.

under the late president Gamal Abdul Nasser, he was head of the state information service. Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, appointed him minister of state for cabinet affairs in 1970 and two years later he was made Egypt's U.N. representative.

As foreign minister, he has emphasised Egypt's commitment to peace with Israel. But in recent years he has become sharply critical of Israel's treatment of Palestinians under occupation.

A milestone in his early days in office was the resumption of ties with the Soviet Union after a five-year break.

He is partly credited for winning Egypt's case against Israel in a dispute over the 700-metre Taba border strip returned to Egypt in 1989 through international arbitration.

He ran Egyptian Diplomacy as Arab states gradually restored ties with Cairo, broken over the peace treaty with Israel.

Egypt was reinstated as a full member of the Arab League in 1989 after a 10-year suspension, and the league's headquarters moved back to Cairo on January 1 after 11 years in Tunis.

Abdul Maguid is married with three sons.

LETTER

Raise your voices

To the Editor

"MESSAGES" from the omnipotent published on May 15, was a well-written article that perfectly expressed my point of view and I dare say, that of quite a few other people of the silent population as well.

A lot of decisions that affect our daily lives seem to be taking place without our consent these days, and what is terrifying is that an escalating pattern seems to be emerging from the "omnipotent" powers that would like to dictate our way of life — what we see in our free time and who is allowed or not allowed to watch his/her children perform at school performances, which are mainly staged for parents in the first place.

I do not claim to represent the majority of the population in my opinions, but, after all, this is a democracy and every citizen has the right to voice his/her opinions. I am exercising my right and hoping that more people will do so before we are overwhelmed with decisions we do not approve of but which affect our lives drastically.

Hana Ramadan
Amman.

This week in print

SEVERAL TOPICS ranging from James Baker's mission in the Middle East to the destruction of crops in the Jordan Valley as a result of irrigation with polluted water from the King Talal Dam were covered extensively by the local dailies in the past week.

Ahmad Dhiban writing in Sawt Al Shaab was strongly critical of the three ministers who were supposed to attend a meeting with the valley farmers to discuss the problem and means to avert further disasters to the crops. Pained at seeing their crops dying and frustrated with the attitude of the officials who failed to turn up for the meeting, the farmers are not to blame for staging a protest march to make their voice heard, said Dhiban.

The writer said that the ball is now in the government's court and it is the duty of Parliament members to urge the government to act immediately. His views were echoed by Mohammad Daoud who said that by avoiding the meeting the ministers have complicated matters for the government.

Writing in Al Dustour, the columnist stressed that the question of contaminated water reaching the crops was a serious matter that required solution on the national level, and by avoiding the matter now or postponing decisions can only aggravate the situation for the country as a whole. Another columnist, tackling the situation urged the government to refer the matter to the judiciary and said that a court ruling can serve justice to all parties. Khalil Khouri said in Sawt Al Shaab that the Jordan Valley is the main source for food supplies in Jordan and those responsible for the disaster there should face trial and get punishment while the farmers ought to be compensated. The farmers may have lost JD 60 million worth of crops, said the writer, but the country's food security is now at stake.

Ahmad Dabbas in Sawt Al Shaab said that the factories along the Zarqa river which dumped waste that flowed to the King Talal Dam that irrigates the valley farmlands are to blame for the whole situation. Therefore, he said, a solution to the agricultural sector lies with the treatment of the waste water reaching the King Talal Dam, and the government has to define specifications for this matter and ensure their implementation.

Two columnists were particularly critical of government ministers who busy themselves with unimportant matters and tend to ignore the real issues and the real substance of problems plaguing the Jordanian economy. Salah Elkur who writes in Sawt Al Shaab said that instead of tackling the issues of water contamination, the destruction of the crops in the Jordan Valley, the question of poverty and unemployment in the Kingdom and many other issues Parliament members and ministers are nowadays busy themselves with such question as separating men from women in government departments, issuing orders as to who can or cannot attend the school sports events and whether school girls should or should not put on the veil. These people elected to do their job ought to find solutions for the country's real problems, stressed Elkur.

Another columnist, Tareq Masarweh, criticised the government ministers for giving conflicting views about the causes behind the destruction of the crops, and for failing to take prompt action to stop the pollution.

Writing in Al Ra'i daily the columnist also criticised the minister of education for barring fathers from attending youth activities in which their daughters take part, and the minister of agriculture for insisting on allowing goats to graze in forests while realising that the animals tend to eat off the trees and endanger the crops.

The writer pointed out that these ministers' actions are doing no good for the country. His views were echoed by the editor of social affairs in Al Ra'i who said that the education minister's decision contradicts the very principle of causing an interaction within the Jordanian society and has no educational objective nor can it be of service to Islam.

The education problem is for the whole Jordanian society to deal with and not for the minister alone, the writer noted.

Writing on the same topic in Sawt Al Shaab Nidal Sukkidan said that the students taking part in school events are indeed encouraged to do so when they realise that their parents would be watching their skills and this gives impetus to students to take part in more youth activities. The writer noted that parents take pride in watching their children involved in useful activities and the government should not take any step to halt such human feeling.

At least one columnist tackled tourism. Mohammad Daoudieh noted that thousands of Iraqis are now making plans to visit Jordan in the wake of the Gulf war and are making arrangements to come this summer. Jordan which abounds with summer resorts and archaeological sites can only welcome such a move and open the way for the visitors who can stimulate the tourism industry that lay dormant for so long due to the Gulf crisis.

But, he said, apart from visiting places of interest, the Iraqis will be buying their needs and using our hotels and restaurants and national products. The writer called on the private and public sectors to make full preparations to receive the visitors and to offer all tourists the best that Jordan can offer.

Another columnist tackled the question of unsettled telephone bills and said that those defaulting are businesses and individuals who massed fortunes through the use of telephones for local and long distance calls. Ahmad Dabbas said that by failing to settle their dues these citizens are stealing from public funds, a crime that should not be ignored.

The Arab League Council meeting in Cairo Wednesday was discussed by Mahmoud Rimawi in Al Ra'i daily. The only candidate to the post of Arab League secretary general was Egyptian Foreign Minister Esmat Abdul Maguid, and in the light of the unanimous support on the part of the Arab countries of this candidate, one can conclude that Arab governments realise the role which Egypt can play in the Arab arena, and, therefore, Cairo is expected to act towards unifying the Arab ranks and ending divisions resulting from the Gulf crisis, said Rimawi. He said it is unfortunate to see Egypt pursuing the same policies adopted during the crisis and has not shown any sign of relenting yet.

There is a real and serious imbalance in inter-Arab relations, and one sign of this was recently manifested in Egypt's sudden decision to pull out its forces from the Gulf region regardless of the Damascus declaration which arranged for Syria and Egypt to retain forces in the Gulf, the writer noted. This situation, he said, requires immediate action to revive solidarity among Arab states and safeguard national Arab interests.

For Taher Al Udwan, Egypt's decision to pull out from the Gulf contradicted the Damascus declaration and the spirit of solidarity. Writing in Al Dustour Udwan said that Egypt's decision was motivated by dissatisfaction with the GCC policies which gave preference to the presence of American forces and the Kuwaiti government's refusal to allow Egyptian firms to have a share in the reconstruction of Kuwait. The writer said that the Egyptians will soon discover the grave loss the Arabs sustained by allowing the foreign nations interfere in their affairs and it would not be long before those Arabs who backed the American-led alliance realised their grave blunder.

Several columnists tackled the latest tour of the region by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker. Mustafa Abu Libdeh, a columnist in Sawt Al Shaab daily described the on-going superpower efforts as part of a joint strategy aimed at dividing their spheres of influence in the region at a time when the American and Soviet leaders' political future is at stake. The writer noted that President Bush is faced with his role in the Iranagate scandal and the negotiations with the Iranian rulers in 1980 on delaying the release of the American hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran until Reagan has been installed as president.

He said that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev is faced with enormous problems at home and the coming few months could witness his downfall. Although the U.S.-Soviet approach to settle the Middle East issue seems to be acceptable to the Arabs, it is threatened with total collapse at any time, said the writer.

Mahmoud Rimawi went a step further by pointing out that the U.S. administration does not intend to implement the international legitimacy and the Security Council resolutions but aims to establish relations between the Arabs and Israel at the expense of the Palestinian people whose problem he considers as an internal problem for Israel. The writer noted that Washington is not only aiming at ending the state of war between Israel on the one hand and its Arab neighbours on the other, but rather to establish ties between Israel and all the Arab countries including those in the Gulf region. That delaying action in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict can only complicate matters and the lack of genuine and lasting peace can only create a climate for future conflict.

Western Europeans seek peacebroker's role

By Katia Sabat

CAIRO — In the wake of U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's high-profile tour of the Middle East, Europe looked as though it was taking the back seat in the region. But a recent delegation sent by the Western European Union (WEU) to Cairo has reaffirmed Europe's role to play an active part in the search for peace in the Middle East.

Led by French Senator Robert Pontillon, the WEU Commission met Egyptian leaders and discussed the post-Gulf war situation, as well as ideas for future cooperation and development. Set up in 1948 and amended in 1954 to include West Germany, the WEU includes nine member countries. Operating in parallel to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the WEU long seen as a shadowy organisation with abstract aims is now gaining in importance, in particular in France. As the representatives of the only European body with defence and security responsibilities, the 15-member WEU delegation to Cairo also discussed disarmament and collective security in the region.

While the London-based WEU generally keeps a low profile, its officials point out that in 1987, during the Iran-Iraq war, it helped ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf. In the recent Kuwait-Iraq crisis it helped enforce the United Nations embargo against Iraq, as well as aiding coordination between the multinational naval forces. "It is not a well-known fact that we did a lot of the work in the Gulf," notes Pontillon, whose country currently holds the one-year revolving presidency of the organisation.

"Half of the ships involved in enforcing the embargo were flying the WEU flag. Since April 30, we have been involved in 70 per cent of the mine sweeping operations, as well as coordinating aid to the Kurdish refugees."

In Cairo, Egyptian officials were eager to discuss future relations, in particular the impact on Egypt of the European Single Act of 1992 which will create a free market between the 12 EEC countries. Commented Pontillon: "Our contacts at the highest level in Egypt revealed great coherence between the ambitions and views of both sides. 'Europe must be involved,' President Mubarak told me."

Europeans and Egyptians agreed on the need for greater enforcement of international law in order to guarantee the rights of people such as the Kurds and the Palestinians. Pontillon stressed that the idea recently voiced by outgoing French Prime Minister Michel Rocard concerning the right to interference in the internal affairs of a country, in case of genocide, for example, is gaining support in international institutions. "Human rights violations affect the world as a whole," said Pontillon, "and the right of interference in the internal affairs of a state when human rights are concerned is a concept that can go a long way within the context of the United Nations. The U.N. system allowed for the operation in the Gulf and there is reason to hope that a Military Staff Committee could be established. The committee is provided for by the U.N. Charter, but it has never

been operational because of old antagonisms. An international force could then be created to be mobilised at very short notice when needed by the secretary general. The Europeans are heading in the direction of this idea, and Egypt agrees fully."

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg, chairman of the British delegation and president of the WEU's Committee for Rules of Procedure and Privileges, explained: "The U.N.'s dream is to have its own police force. This has been impossible until now for many reasons, but as a result of the changes in the Soviet Union's position after it saw China align itself with the U.N. decisions concerning the Gulf crisis, I believe in the coming decade it will be possible to have a force placed under the secretary general without running up against the veto of the Security Council. But in order for this to become a reality, we must have trust."

Trust, say members of the European delegation, is a key element for the future of the Middle East region. "We have spent the past 40 years dominated by the logic of East-West tension," noted the Vice-President of the WEU, Spain's Miguel Angel Martinez. "I think we have already gone some way to adopting the rule of International Law. This is important progress in the context of the post-Gulf war era. We must take advantage of the cohesion in the international community and use the impetus to solve many other conflicts that remain."

The Spanish official added that the emphasis must now be placed on respect for International Law. "We need to lay down the rules and set up the framework," he added. "This is in fact essential for progress in the development of international relations, and therefore of humanity."

In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the European and Egyptian officials discussed problems such as Israel's continued policy of establishing settlements in the West Bank. Also on the agenda was the recent proposal for a regional conference and Israel's intransigence concerning the composition of the Palestinian delegation that would attend the talks, as well as the question of Europe's participation.

"It is impossible to ask one side to make an effort when the other side is not prepared to make the same effort," commented Sir Geoffrey Finsberg. "That being said, we condemn the (creation of) Israeli settlements. But I must add that we must stop being pessimistic. Who could have foretold the rise of Gorbachev and subsequent events? This is an example of how one person has changed the nature of international relations. The point here is that we need to get a similar process going and start a thaw in relations. We must place our faith in intelligence and wisdom."

The WEU President Pontillon is adamant when it comes to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's demands regarding the composition of the Palestinian delegation that would attend the conference: "The WEU has never passed a clear resolution on this subject, so I speak personally," he indicated. "But I contest the Israeli government's right to choose the Palestinian delega-

tion. It is up to the Palestinians to choose those who are to speak for them. I did not agree with the PLO's position during the Gulf war," he added, referring to the PLO's support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "At the same time, there should be no interference in the Palestinian people's choice of their own representatives. Neither Israel, nor any other country, has the right to decide who is qualified to speak in the name of the Palestinians and decide on their future."

In addition, Pontillon is critical of Israel's rejection of European participation in a peace conference. "We do not understand Israel's attitude and we do not accept it. Israel should not forget that Europe helped it establish itself in the Middle East. Nor should Israel forget that most of its leaders have ties to Europe." One point in favour of peace is that there is evidence of a growing discrepancy between the conservative Israeli government's policies and public opinion. For example, recent polls showed that 58 per cent of Israelis now favour ending direct rule of the West Bank and Gaza, up from 50 per cent a year ago and 46 per cent five years ago.

The WEU representatives expressed optimism concerning a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Manuel Suarez Costa of Portugal noted: "Our fundamental aim is to achieve peace and stability in the region, and this implies a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem, the Lebanese problem, the Kurdish problem, etc. This will have to be done with respect for the territorial integrity of the countries of the region. But peace is sometimes more difficult to win than war. We need to take it in stages and the first step is confidence. A 40-year-old problem cannot be solved overnight."

"We must break the confrontation pattern and react to questionable attitudes with firmness," Pontillon said. "We must establish a pattern of persuasion, conviction and confidence. Who would have believed four years ago that the Berlin wall would be torn down? It is true that the Arab-Israeli issue is emotionally charged and that there is uselessly aggressive behaviour. What is also true is that Europe wants to play a fully-fledged role in bringing about a solution... the most important thing is for the two sides to meet and sit at the same table. Once that happens, the process will be on its way."

The French senator concluded that there is also work to be done in Europe, where he admits, public opinion is ill-informed on the problems of the region. "For example, people do not realise there are really two Palestinian questions," he said, arguing that the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip pose different problems. "The Gaza Strip alone presents a whole series of extremely serious human and political problems. Those same human rights were talking about are being violated, and the European Community should react. I do not wish to talk about sanctions in this context, but I believe that a change in public opinion in our countries could finally bring some pressure to bear on Israel." World News Link.

Israeli 'tourists' in Cyprus kept happy

By Panos Poriolaous

LAST Thursday (May 9), the Nicosia District Court imposed a fine of 500 pounds per head on four Israelis for trespassing with intent to commit a felony. Upon hearing the ruling the Israelis smiled in relief. By now, the Israelis, who are used to having things their own way, must be back home and chances are that they are not just smiling. They have every right to laugh at the Cyprus judicial system, the police and the government itself. This case cannot be casually dismissed as a simple incident as the light sentence imposed implies.

The four Israelis were not just trespassing on the night of April 23, 1991. They were meddling with the telephone junction box in the building that houses the Iranian embassy clearly intending to bug the embassy's telephones. Initially, the prosecution had filed charges against the perpetrators for conspiracy to commit a felony, loitering in suspicious

circumstances, trying to damage telephone cables, attempting to eavesdrop on the Iranian Embassy phones and carrying wireless transceivers without permission.

But the prosecution suddenly decided to drop all the charges, because, as Assistant Attorney General Loucaides said, the basic elements and facts were sufficiently covered by the trespassing charge! This line of thinking is truly incredible since it is not clear how a simple charge for trespassing, a civil offence, is the equivalent of a criminal offence which also carries clear political connotations.

But it is not just the court which should be blamed for letting the accused get away in such light fashion. The whole story made the police force look like the idiots and subordinates of a hand full of Israeli embassy security officials who single-handedly and in complete disregard to existing procedures, behaved as if they were the local police force.

When the four Israelis arrived at court the embassy officials jostled journalists around to make room for the accused while Cyprus policemen stood by watching. The security guards are even said to have carried weapons.

And throughout this travesty of legal proceedings, the government kept a low profile as if intimidated by the Israeli show of arrogance and disregard of the fact that, after all, this incident occurred in Cyprus and the case was to be decided by a Cypriot court, not an Israeli court. Either way the Israelis got what they wanted, a favourably court ruling that dismissed the probability for embarrassment of the Israeli state abroad, while delivering a slap in the face of the Iranians who have every right to feel offended.

Is this case of applying double standards, even of being racist? One need only consider what an Arab would have to go through in a similar case. Never mind the fact that he would surely be deported or jailed or that he would be considered a terrorist even before entering through the doors of Nicosia District Court. These days, the word Arab has skillfully been turned in to a synonym for terrorist anyway.

When Arabs arrive at Larnaca airport enroute to another

destination, and have to stay in Cyprus overnight, they are stripped of their passports and made to sleep inside the airport. But this is understandable. After all they are Arabs. And for those Arabs who are so daring as to want to stay in Cyprus for more than one night, the police have more tricks up their sleeves. Policemen make regular visits to car rental areas and pick up customer catalogues. If an Arab name is on the list, the police are certain to pick up the guy's address, pay him a visit and give him some of the old Cypriot policy harassment that only an Arab is worthy of. But this is understandable. Every Arab deserves what he gets.

Now if the police were so clever as to pick up the names of Israelis renting cars — but of course they are not — they would have followed the four Israelis, who posed as couples on a tourist visit, and would have caught them in the act of preparing and carrying out the crimes for which they were accused. But they didn't presumably because Israelis are generally considered good people while Arabs are not. As a result, Arabs can be harassed even when they do not commit a crime whereas Israelis can harass everyone else even when they do commit a crime.

But this simple conclusion, though a bit stretched, is not

the end of this story. Because the Arabs may be naive, but not so naive as to swallow everything. And although the Iranians are not Arabs, they are still bound to be unhappy with what has transpired in this case. Iran and a host of Arab countries are traditional friends of Cyprus who have patiently stood by us in international forums. Playing games with that patience is not good policy. Doing favours to the Israelis is one thing. But if doing so also means offending another friendly country, the whole art of international diplomacy for the government will sooner or later turn into a risky business.

Cyprus is not situated in the best part of the world as far as political differences go. By being part of the volatile Middle East, this country usually finds herself in the position of having to maintain a delicate balance between the countries of the area that are not odds with each other, and this is not a simple task. But punishing one side even when it is clearly the victim, is now good policy. The Iranian Embassy has kept a low profile in this case and they should be commended for that unlike their Israeli counterparts who have shoved everyone aside until they got what they wanted. The Cyprus government may have good reason to worry — Cyprus Mail.

Kuwait lacks equipment, data to deal with environmental disaster

KUWAIT (R) — Birds drop from the sky as if shot, cattle keel over while eating contaminated grass. People in Kuwait are worried that the government is unable to assess the human health risks posed by oilfield infernos.

Nearly three months after about 600 oil wells were set ablaze in the war, igniting one of the world's worst environmental disasters, the first are still sending up thick, acrid smoke containing tonnes of toxic gas and acid.

"I believe this is about the same size as Chernobyl... the only difference is that toxic, not nuclear, gas is involved," Art van Remundt, director of the environmental group Earthtrust, said referring to the Soviet nuclear accident in 1986.

Assessing the potential health risk has become more urgent as the 400,000 Kuwaitis who either fled or were abroad when Iraqi troops invaded on Aug. 2 began flying back Saturday.

Some of the first to arrive said they would go back to Europe as soon as possible after getting their homes and affairs in order to escape the pollution and the summer heat.

Jassim Al Hassan, a biochemist who leads a group of 23 Kuwaiti scientists surveying the effects of the pollution, said their major difficulty was lack of equipment.

"The problem is too immense to be handled by Kuwait or regional authorities. The problem is international and we need the expertise of the world to take care of the situation," Mr. Hassan said.

His Kuwait Environmental Action Team is working with Mr. Van Remundt's Hawaii-based group, which until 1986 was called Save the Whales, to help the authorities identify and tackle the emirate's environmental problems.

Dubbing the pollution "killer smog," the Earthtrust team reports growing numbers of cows, sheep and donkeys dying in areas

near Kuwait City from feeding on contaminated grasses.

Migrating birds flying over the Gulf are dipping into oil pools in the desert, mistaking them for water, Mr. Van Remundt said.

Birds fall from the sky after flying through the black smog clouds. Other birds as well as some animals blinded by the acids in the smoke are starving to death.

White cats in the streets of Kuwait City have turned grey. Sheep are black and the few patches of greenery around the oil fields have been covered with asphalt-like soot.

"It is very bad. You have some 500 oil wells on fire. Some 100 have been put out but many are still gushing, pouring huge lakes of oil into the desert," Mr. Van Remundt said.

He criticised the government for not offering advice on how people could protect themselves, even though many reported they were feeling ill, especially near the oilfields.

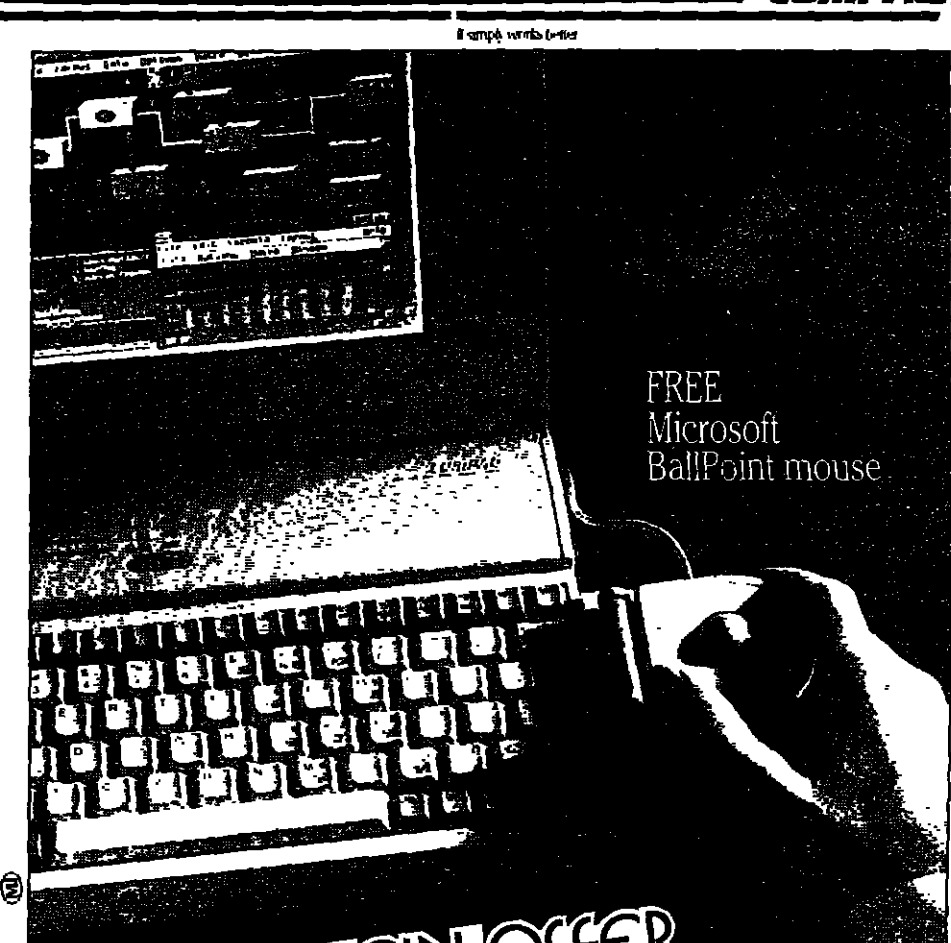
"The government is not that much aware of the problem, and that in itself is a problem to us," Mr. Van Remundt said.

Mr. Hassan disagreed. "A senior minister told me the pollution issue is among the government's top priorities," he said, while noting that the state was preoccupied with other pressing concerns 10 weeks after Iraqi troops left Kuwait.

Mr. Hassan said he was putting together a list of equipment needed to carry out research on the pollution.

He said the government was willing to spend millions of dollars on the equipment, without which no one could accurately gauge the effects of the pollution on the human population.

Mr. Van Remundt said the group was preparing a report calling on the government to put out the oil fires quickly, offer clear advice and instructions, and carry out environmental tests.



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JORDAN TIMES, SATURDAY, MAY 18, 1991 7

Financial Markets

U.S. Dollar in International Markets

Currency	New York Close (15/5/91)	Tokyo Close (16/5/91)
Sterling Pound	1.7545	1.7530
Deutsche Mark	1.6640	1.6910
Swiss Franc	1.4250	1.4305
French Franc	5.7145	5.7410
Japanese Yen	137.10	137.30
European Currency Unit	1.2200	1.2160

Eurocurrency Interest Rates Date: 16/5/1991

Currency	1 MTH	3 MTHS	6 MTHS	12 MTHS
U.S. Dollar	5.87	6.00	6.12	6.50
Sterling Pound	11.93	11.56	11.12	11.12
Deutsche Mark	8.81	8.93	9.06	9.12
Swiss Franc	7.87	8.06	8.12	7.87
French Franc	9.12	9.12	9.18	9.31
Japanese Yen	7.64	7.76	7.62	7.40
European Currency Unit	9.37	9.43	9.50	9.68

Previous Metals Date: 16/5/1991

Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm	Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm
Gold	359.75	6.70	Silver	4.11	.87

Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin Date: 16/5/1991

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	.677	.679
Sterling Pound	1.1897	1.1956
Deutsche Mark	.4012	.4032
Swiss Franc	.4743	.4767
French Franc	.1182	.1188
Japanese Yen	.4933	.4958
Dutch Guilder	.3561	.3579
Swedish Krona	.1115	.1121
Italian Lira	.0539	.0542
Belgian Franc	.01943	.01953

Other Currencies Date: 16/5/1991

Currency	Bid	Offer
Bahraini Dinar	1.7310	1.7500
Lebanese Lira	.0720	.0740
Saudi Riyal	.1801	.1820
Kuwaiti Dinar	-	-
Qatari Riyal	.1825	.1843
Egyptian Pound	.2000	.2100
Omani Riyal	1.7100	1.7300
UAE Dirham	.1821	.1840
Greek Drachma	.3550	.3750
Cypriot Pound	1.4400	1.4600

CAS Indices for Amman Financial Market

Index	14/5/1991	Close	15/5/1991	Close
All-Share	113.48		113.24	
Banking Sector	110.08		109.52	
Insurance Sector	111.94		112.06	
Industry Sector	117.67		117.88	
Services Sector	123.50		123.39	

LONDON EXCHANGE RATES

LONDON (R) — Following are the buying and selling rates for leading world currencies and gold against the dollar at midsession on the London foreign exchange and bullion markets Friday.

One Sterling	1.7395/7405	U.S. dollar	1.1500/05
One U.S. dollar	1.7035/40	Canadian dollar	1.9185/95
	1.9185/95	Deutsche marks	1.4430/35
	35.03/07	Dutch guilders	5.7725/75
	1268/1269	Swiss francs	137.65/75
	6.1160/1210	Belgian francs	6.6300/50
	6.5050/5100	French francs	6.5050/5100
One ounce of gold	354.50/355.00	Japanese yen	126.80/85
		Swedish crowns	13.40/45
		Norwegian crowns	13.40/45
		Danish crowns	13.40/45
		U.S. dollars	1.1500/05

Poland devalues zloty by 14.4 per cent

WARSAW (R) — Poland devalued its currency, the zloty, by 14.4 per cent after holding its rate fixed at 9,500 to the dollar for more than 16 months, the official PAP news agency said Friday.

In a move that signalled government concern over a slump in domestic production and falling exports, the new rate of the zloty against the dollar was fixed at 11,000.

The move was decided at a late-night extraordinary meeting of the cabinet.

Exporters had pressed strongly for a devaluation to make their products more competitive abroad but the government had resisted the move.

As recently as last month, Warsaw told the International Monetary Fund it would keep the exchange rate stable in order to hold inflation in check.

But PAP quoted Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz as saying a devaluation was now necessary in view of the dollar's strength and to keep Polish exports profitable.

"In recent months we noted a major growth of value of the dollar against other currencies which complicated the situation of Polish exports," he said.

"This required a decision to increase the dollar's rate against the zloty, which should influence

a growth of profitability of exports," he added.

Balcerowicz said he believed that the inflationary impulse of the devaluation would be minimal.

The devaluation was announced hours before the opening of a special conference called by President Lech Walesa to assess the past 16 months of austerity and seek ways of halting the Polish economy out of recession.

The conference, to be attended by prominent economists and experts, had been expected to exert strong pressure on the government for a devaluation.

Exports recorded spectacular growth last year as Poland notched up a foreign trade surplus of \$3.4 billion with hard currency partners and \$4.4 billion with the Soviet-led Comecon bloc. The current commercial exchange rate, used for foreign trade transactions, is 1.79 roubles to the dollar.

But the combination of a fixed exchange rate and high domestic inflation, 250 per cent last year, eroded the competitiveness of exports.

The Gulf war and the collapse of export markets in the Soviet Union and the former East Germany have also dealt powerful shocks to the economy.

Amman Financial Market weekly trading

Following is a summary of trading during last week and the previous week:

	May 11-15	May 4-8
Daily average	JD 2,065,732	JD 2,518,084
Total volume	JD 10,328,628	JD 12,590,432
No. of contracts	6,801,184	8,157,581
	5,770	6,562

Sectoral trading:

	JD 7,790,164	JD 7,380,004
Industrial	(75.4%)	(58.6%)
Financial	JD 1,311,252	JD 1,919,782
	(12.7%)	(23.2%)
Service	(9.3%)	(15.1%)
Insurance	(2.6%)	(3.1%)
Share price index	133.7	133.6
No. of companies	76	73
Price movement (rise)	34	29
(Decline)	30	35
(Stable)	12	9

WORLD STOCK MARKETS

TOKYO — Japanese stocks closed higher after five days of losses, pulled up in thin trading by New York's overnight rise of one per cent. The 225-share Nikkei average rose 181.67 points, or 0.71 per cent, to close at 25,701.94 with 260 million shares changing hands.

SYDNEY — Australian shares took a breather after vigorous buying Thursday spurred by a cut in official interest rates. Dealers said the bullish trend should return next week. The All Ordinaries index was down 8.6 points to 1,531.7.

HONG KONG — Stocks ended higher on a burst of late buying. The Hang Seng index climbed 23.18 points to 3,882.84, outstripping a previous post-1987 crash high close of 3,869.70 on April 3.

SINGAPORE — Prices rose over a broad front to close at the day's highs in moderate trading despite some profit-taking in the afternoon. The Straits Times industrial index rose 10.69 points to close at 1,513.75.

BOMBAY — Share prices retreated to end mixed after a bullish start triggered heavy profit-taking. The Bombay Stock Exchange index ended up 6.19 points to 1,207.69. The national index rose 2.12 to 642.66.

FRANKFURT — Despite lively demand in a small number of second-tier issues, German shares ended mostly unchanged in quiet trade. The DAX index edged 0.79 points higher to 1,598.87.

ZURICH — Swiss shares closed little changed with a firmer bias. The all-share SPI index closed 2.7 points higher at 1,079.6. The blue-chip SMI index rose 4.7 to 1,659.5.

PARIS — French share prices ended barely changed, as satisfaction over the reappointment of Pierre Bergavoy as finance minister wore off and the market turned its attention to the fact that interest rates have not been cut. The CAC-40 index ended down a negligible 0.65 points to 1,826.96.

LONDON — Sporadic end-of-the-account buying lifted British shares from their lows, but the market still finished lower on disappointment at Friday's April inflation figures. The FTSE 100 index ended 18.0 points lower at 2,453.9.

NEW YORK — U.S. Blue Chips recovered some losses in late morning amid some futures-related buying as the bond market trimmed its losses. By 1556 GMT the Dow Jones industrial average was down 13.87 points to 2,880.14.

Top Swiss banker tells Arabs not to fear new secrecy law

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A senior Swiss banker has assured Gulf customers that they would enjoy secrecy in Swiss banks, despite recent legal changes there.

"The Swiss banker's legal obligation to preserve the confidentiality of its customers remains unchanged," said Eduard Schmid, senior representative of Credit Suisse.

"The banks are obligated to precisely identify their customers" — not the content of their accounts — under the new regulations, he said.

"The decision by the supervisory authorities to abolish the so-called Form B accounts has not in any way changed the content and significance of Swiss banking secrecy," Schmid told a news conference.

He said he had received phone calls from customers enquiring about reports that Swiss banks had abolished their secrecy. Billions of dollars from the oil-rich region are deposited in Swiss and other banks around the world.

But Schmid said any revision to banking secrecy would require either a national referendum or a parliamentary decree.

He said banks are still prohibited from revealing information about the affairs of customers to any agency or office.

Explosive mixture of poverty, riches marks Iraqi economy

By Walter Putnam
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — In Baghdad's "thieves' market," so named because most goods came from Kuwait, top-line running shoes sell for \$10. Cameras, watches, jewellery are all bargains in the alleys and avenues downtown near the Tigris River — as long as hard currency is the medium of trade.

But the Iraqi dinar has little power to buy food for households inhabited by the unemployed, another product of the Gulf crisis triggered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last August.

Iraq's post-war economy has become an explosive mix of riches and poverty. Those with dollars can live like kings. Those without may soon be doomed to poverty as inflation and shortages take an increasingly heavy toll.

At the official exchange rate, one dinar is worth \$3.2. On the black market, a dollar can buy five or six dinars, depending on the trader.

The discrepancy widens the gap between the haves and have-nots, adding to the undercurrent of uncertainty about how long the government can hold the country together.

It also adds to the urgency government leaders face in getting U.N. sanctions lifted so they can trade again, free frozen foreign assets and sell \$1 billion a month worth of oil. It has the world's second-largest supply sitting in the ground.

The U.N. ceasefire agreement



Saadi Mehdi Saleh allows Iraq to import food and medicine when it can afford to.

But British Prime Minister John Major recently vowed to use his country's U.N. veto power to foil any further lifting of sanctions — apparently including oil sales — as long as President Saddam remains in power.

Trade Minister Saadi Mehdi Saleh told foreign reporters recently that Iraq's recovery "totally depends on oil."

"The prospects of trade will be dependent on trading our frozen money," Saleh said of the billions in assets frozen after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Without the oil sales, he said, life will be difficult but it won't be impossible to survive.

"We are surviving from our internal production. We are surviving to defend our territory and our dignity," he said.

Saleh said the black market would eventually fade.

"It depends on when we open trade, when we import more. This will reduce what we call a commercial market. It is not a black market. Actually, it's free trade," he said.

Still, inflation — which a source in the finance ministry said was 210 per cent from the end of the war in mid-February to the

end of March — has driven many people to desperate straits.

"People are turning to crime. My house has been burglarised twice since the war started. People have to eat. What are they going to do?" said a businessman, who asked not to be identified.

Eggs and meat doubled in price from seven dinars in January to 11 to 16 dinars in April. That's a hefty bite out of the average income of about 200 dinars a month.

Amer, an engineer and builder, said a tonne of cement once cost 27 to 30 dinars. Recently, he bought it for 250 dinars and that was only because "someone did me a favour," he said.

On Sheikh Omar Street, a long stretch of auto parts and supply stores, business appears to be booming.

"Everything is available, but it is very expensive," one shop operator said.

Many people wonder whether parts for everything from automobiles to machinery will be available at all if sanctions continue for many more weeks.

The economic woes are aggravated by joblessness caused by factories damaged in Gulf war bombing and sanctions shut-downs of other businesses.

Recently, tens of thousands of young men were released from the army in a massive demobilisation by President Saddam and the ruling Revolutionary Command Council.

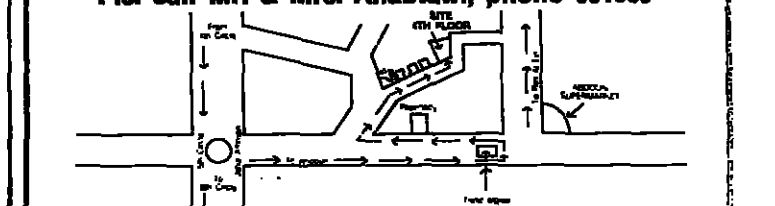
"Their best working life, between 24 and 30, has been wasted," said Amer, who predicted the added men on the street could lead to lawlessness.

"This will force people to look for business in not the straight way, in order to support themselves," he said.

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U.K's opposition Labour seizes 'safe' Conservative Party seat

ABERGAVERN, Wales (R) — Britain's opposition Labour Party seized a once-safe Conservative parliamentary seat in a dramatic by-election victory Friday, fuelling its hopes of ending more than a decade of Conservative rule at the next general election.

It humiliated the Conservatives in the poll for Monmouth constituency in Wales by demolishing their previous majority of 9,350 votes.

Labour's Hum Edwards, a 38-year-old lecturer, beat the Conservative candidate by 2,406.

"Triumph is the only word that fits," jubilant Labour leader Neil Kinnock said. "We have taken a bedrock Tory seat."

The swing from the ruling party of almost 13 per cent, if repeated across Britain in a general election, would return Labour to power and end the period of unbroken Conservative rule begun by Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

Her successor as Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, is beset by an economic recession and an inexorable rise in unemployment but must call a general

election by mid-1992.

Conservative Party chairman Chris Patten put a brave face on the Monmouth result, saying by-elections were opportunities for protest votes and were often "disastrous" for incumbent governments which then went on to win back power nationally.

Monmouth, which fell vacant on the death of a Conservative who had held it for 21 years, had been the party's second most secure seat in Wales. The loss still leaves the ruling party with a big majority in the 650-seat House of Commons, but was its fifth by-election defeat in a row.

The last Conservative by-election win was in February 1989.

Labour campaigned on a pledge to levy higher taxes on the rich and spend more on Britain's free health service.

In a bitter campaign, it portrayed Conservative reforms that allow some hospitals the freedom to finance themselves as a step towards a U.S.-style free market in health care.

The beaten ruling party candidate, lawyer Roger Evans, accused Labour of "massive disinformation" over the health reforms.

Britain's economic recession has deepened since November when Major, 48, took after a revolt by Conservative backbench MPs which led Thatcher to resign.

Monmouth voter Doris Williams, an 81-year-old widow, said she had switched allegiance to the centrist Liberal Democrats and away from the Conservatives who "just cannot seem to sort themselves out on anything."

The Liberal Democrats came third with 11,164 votes in the Monmouth ballot, in which voting was held Thursday and the result declared early Friday.

Labour's vote held firm in its traditional strongholds in the constituency, such as the bleak state housing complex in Weysham village.

"What's good about the Conservatives? My husband's been unemployed for 11 years and we have three children," said Dorothy Bowen, 25, of Weysham.

The British slump is blamed on high interest rates imposed to squeeze inflation out of the economy.

Figures released Thursday showed unemployment rose last month by 84,100 to 2.18 million, or 7.6 per cent of the workforce, the biggest April increase since World War II.

As Monmouth voted, Chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont provoked outrage by saying higher unemployment was "a price well worth paying" to beat inflation.

The Bank of England (central bank) warned Major against premature interest rate cuts.

Nationally, Labour led the Conservatives by 40 points to 38 in a "poll of polls" reported by the British Broadcasting Corporation's Newsnight television programme Thursday.

It was the first time Labour had led in this sample, taken by four opinion pollsters, since Major succeeded Thatcher.

There had been speculation before the Monmouth vote that Major might gamble on a snap general election this June.

But Conservative Chairman Patten said on television that he saw a "jolly strong argument" for waiting until next year.

Islamabad (R) — Pakistan's National Assembly, ignoring opposition protests, has voted to make the Islamic Sharia Code the supreme law for the country's 100 million people.

The Sharia bill was passed by the 217-seat assembly by voice vote after an acrimonious debate in which the opposition denounced it as fundamentalist and undemocratic.

The People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and liberal Muslims say the law will strengthen fundamentalism, weaken parliament and block progress on issues such as women's rights.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who steered the bill through parliament's lower house, denied women's rights would be infringed. He said he had tried to accommodate the views of opposition deputies in the bill.

Sharif specifically denied opposition charges that he had brought in the bill under pressure from fundamentalist Muslim clerics who helped his Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) to victory in last October's election.

"This is totally wrong. This will not happen under my government that anybody can get anything done by putting pressure on me," he said.

Sharif's eight-party IDA, which has big majorities in both houses of parliament, says it is fulfilling a pledge to enforce Sharia in October's election campaign.

The Sharia bill must be approved also by the Senate (upper house) to become law.

Sharif offered an olive branch to the PDA. "I am ready to forget our past confrontation in the interest of the country," he said in a speech to the assembly after the vote.

No immediate comment was available from the PDA which accuses Sharif's party of taking power by election-rigging.

Bhutto, her husband Asif Ali Zardari and several of her former cabinet colleagues are facing trial on disputed charges of corruption during her 20-month government that was dismissed by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, last August.

The assembly softened an original draft of the Sharia bill and ruled that the present parliamentary democratic system and the existing system of government would not be challenged in any court after the bill became law.

But the move has not appeased the PDA. Bhutto was not in the chamber when Sharif spoke.

Some of Sharif's fundamentalist allies say the bill is too weak because it sidesteps their demand to control an Islamic judiciary which could overrule parliament.

"Yes, we want to go backwards to the steps for the Prophet (Mohammad) because his era (14 centuries ago) was the best," Sharif's former Religious Affairs Minister Abdul Sattar Nazki said.



Nawaz Sharif

Pakistani assembly passes Sharia law

Islamabad (R) — Pakistan's National Assembly, ignoring opposition protests, has voted to make the Islamic Sharia Code the supreme law for the country's 100 million people.

The Sharia bill was passed by the 217-seat assembly by voice vote after an acrimonious debate in which the opposition denounced it as fundamentalist and undemocratic.

The People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and liberal Muslims say the law will strengthen fundamentalism, weaken parliament and block progress on issues such as women's rights.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who steered the bill through parliament's lower house, denied women's rights would be infringed. He said he had tried to accommodate the views of opposition deputies in the bill.

Sharif specifically denied opposition charges that he had brought in the bill under pressure from fundamentalist Muslim clerics who helped his Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) to victory in last October's election.

"This is totally wrong. This will not happen under my government that anybody can get anything done by putting pressure on me," he said.

Sharif's eight-party IDA, which has big majorities in both houses of parliament, says it is fulfilling a pledge to enforce Sharia in October's election campaign.

The Sharia bill must be approved also by the Senate (upper house) to become law.

Sharif offered an olive branch to the PDA. "I am ready to forget our past confrontation in the interest of the country," he said in a speech to the assembly after the vote.

No immediate comment was available from the PDA which accuses Sharif's party of taking power by election-rigging.

Bhutto, her husband Asif Ali Zardari and several of her former cabinet colleagues are facing trial on disputed charges of corruption during her 20-month government that was dismissed by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, last August.

The assembly softened an original draft of the Sharia bill and ruled that the present parliamentary democratic system and the existing system of government would not be challenged in any court after the bill became law.

But the move has not appeased the PDA. Bhutto was not in the chamber when Sharif spoke.

Some of Sharif's fundamentalist allies say the bill is too weak because it sidesteps their demand to control an Islamic judiciary which could overrule parliament.

"Yes, we want to go backwards to the steps for the Prophet (Mohammad) because his era (14 centuries ago) was the best," Sharif's former Religious Affairs Minister Abdul Sattar Nazki said.

Police defuse bombs in central Johannesburg

JOHANNESBURG (R) — South African police defused two bombs early Friday, one hidden in a car outside the main police station and the other outside a bank in central Johannesburg.

Police spokesman Eugene Opperman said police believed the two mines were linked to a blast that tore through a restaurant in Johannesburg's Hill-brow nightclub district Thursday evening, injuring eight men, three of them seriously.

"Two limpet mines, one attached to a red BMW outside John Vorster Square Police Headquarters, the other on a pavement outside Volkskas Bank, were rendered harmless by police this morning," Opperman told Reuters.

Opperman said one of the mines was of Soviet origin.

Right-wing militants claimed responsibility for half a dozen bomb attacks on anti-apartheid targets around the city a year ago. The attacks caused injuries and damage but no deaths.

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Government change closely tied to Mitterrand succession

PARIS (R) — New Prime Minister Edith Cresson's appointment of a cabinet hardly changed from the last appears to confirm that France's change of premiers is closely tied to the succession of President Francois Mitterrand.

Cresson announced her new cabinet late Thursday but kept virtually all holders of major portfolios at their posts, indicating no significant policy changes ahead.

The newspaper Le Monde, which has close connections to top French leaders, said hours earlier that the appointment of Cresson, a long-time Mitterrand protégé, was part of a plan to ensure the president's succession went according to his wishes.

Le Monde said Mitterrand named Cresson to thwart the presidential ambitions of his predecessor Michel Rocard, the president's long-time rival for the leadership of the Socialist Party.

Mitterrand, who will be nearly 79 when his term ends in 1995, is widely believed to want to turn over the presidency to Laurent Fabius, another personal protégé who served as his prime minister from 1984 to 1986.

Le Monde said that forcing Rocard's resignation would enhance Fabius' chances of taking over the Socialist Party machine and ensure its backing for his candidacy as president, blocking

that of Rocard and other hopefuls.

Fabius, 44, current president of the National Assembly, is already locked in conflict within the party machine with other presidential hopefuls like Education Minister Lionel Jospin.

Mitterrand said on television after appointing the 57-year-old Cresson Wednesday that he named her because she was best qualified to lead France into the single-market Europe of 1993.

But an opinion poll published Friday in the news magazine Le Point showed 53 per cent of respondents were not convinced by the explanation.

Some 35 per cent said they thought Cresson's appointment was really aimed at ensuring Socialist victory in general elections in 1993. Only small numbers believed other motives were involved.

The victory of a Socialist in the 1995 presidential poll will largely depend on the party winning the 1993 general election and Cresson, France's first woman prime minister, is widely expected to be an ideal vote getter.

Many opposition parliamentarians have already called Cresson's appointment a "media gimmick" aimed at garnering the support of women, who outnumber men among voters.

Students, police clash on eve of Korean anniversary

KWANGJU, South Korea (R) — Hundreds of students clashed with riot police in South Korea's southwestern city of Kwangju Friday on the eve of the emotional anniversary of a failed 1980 uprising.

The students hurled firebombs and bits of paving stones in hit-and-run assaults on the massed olive-drab lines of riot police assembled in the provincial capital for the annual commemoration of the popular uprising in which hundreds died.

More than 8,000 riot police have been posted around Kwangju and authorities have warned they will use force to put down illegal rallies, which include virtually all the events planned by the dissidents.

The law enforcement authorities will cooperate to the greatest extent possible to maintain law and order and provide conveniences for legal assemblies," Kwangju Mayor Lee Hyo-Gae said in a statement.

"On the other hand," he warned, "we have no other choice but to take legal action to protect the public against illegal or violent rallies which threaten the public peace."

The May 18 anniversary of the "Kwangju massacre" draws thousands of students and dissidents to this city of 900,000, a traditional centre of dissent in Korea and the power base of veteran opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung.

The anniversary has a special intensity this year because of the

April 26 death of 20-year-old student Kang Kyung-Dae after being beaten by police during a protest in Seoul.

Kang's death revitalised the flagging South Korean dissident movement and set off weeks of the worst anti-government protests since 1987, when mass street demonstrations forced the military-backed government to concede democratic reforms.

The protests, which significantly have not drawn in the politically dominant middle class, have however thrown the government of President Roh Tae-Woo into turmoil.

Meanwhile about 200 South Korean students attacked a U.S. army housing compound in Seoul Friday with a firebomb. Military officials said there were no injuries or major damage.

Police used teargas to disperse the students from nearby Dongkuk University, who had demonstrated in front of the Hannam Village Housing Complex for about 90 minutes, a U.S. Forces Korea spokesman said.

He said the firebomb struck the library building in the complex but was quickly put out by the base fire brigade.

One student climbed over a chain-link fence and entered the compound but was captured by American military police and turned over to South Korean authorities.

About 43,000 U.S. service personnel are stationed in South Korea.

Soviet military still dominant as morale sags-U.S. report

WASHINGTON (R) — Soviet use of regular troops to quell internal unrest is eroding morale and could endanger the integrity of the armed forces, and intelligence report to the U.S. Congress says.

The report by Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) official Patrick Ducey to Congress's Joint Economic Committee Thursday said draft evasions rose to record proportions last year with over 20 per cent of inductees failing to report for the autumn call-up.

"Military morale and prestige are being eroded by the use of regular forces to quell internal unrest, such as the frequent deployment of airborne troops," Ducey said.

He said recent events in rebellious republics showed that use of force against civilians had polarised Soviet society.

"The prospect of wider use of regular forces, if internal security forces proved insufficient, would severely test military reliability

and cohesion," the report said. "Ethnic strife and separatist challenges to central authority are jeopardising the integrity of the all-union armed forces."

But Ducey said that despite recent turmoil in the Soviet Union, "The armed forces remain the dominant power on the Eurasian continent."

His report, which was presented along with separate intelligence reports on the Soviet and East European economies, described a Soviet military labouring to maintain and effective defence and a robust strategic deterrence.

It predicted that following completion of a treaty limiting conventional forces in Europe (CFE) Soviet forces in the Atlantic-to-Urals zone would be positioned to conduct a strong defence of Soviet territory and would also be able to mobilise a strong offensive force in a few months.

But Ducey added these forces would probably not be sufficient to defeat a reinforced NATO, assuming NATO retained its full entitlement of forces under the treaty.

Modernisation of the Soviet strategic nuclear forces continued despite budget reductions and research and development were expected to display even greater emphasis on air defence, the report said.

It said Soviet arms exports to the Third world fell last year by about 30 per cent in value compared to 1989. This was because of less generous repayment terms and because many customers were experiencing their own economic problems.

Ducey added that Moscow's sales efforts might also be hindered by the image of poorly performing Soviet weapons in the Gulf war and increasingly stiff competition. The decline was expected to continue at least to the mid-1990s, he said.

Hun Sen Cambodian troops to observe truce

BANGKOK (R) — Prime Minister Hun Sen has given a personal pledge to a United Nations envoy that government forces will maintain a ceasefire in Cambodia, but his guerrilla foes Friday accused Phnom Penh of launching a fresh offensive.

Major General Timothy Dibuama, leader of a three-man U.N. truce-monitoring team, told reports of violations "things have quietened down a great deal."

He had just returned from Phnom Penh, last leg of a mission that also took him to guerrilla camps along the Thai-Cambodian border.

The ceasefire, the first in 12 years of warfare, is aimed at fostering a better atmosphere for the next round of talks on a U.N. peace plan that are expected to take place in the Indonesian capital Jakarta next month.

"I can say to you that the authorities (in Phnom Penh) are fully committed to observing the ceasefire up to the Jakarta meeting and even far beyond," Dibuama said.

A guerrilla official in Bangkok said about 3,000 government troops backed by tanks and artillery were trying to force Prince Norodom Sihanouk's forces out of areas along Route Six, the main west-east highway.

The Sihanoukists are allied with the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge and the U.S.-backed Khmer People's National Liberation Front against the Phnom Penh government supported by Vietnam.

Heavy combat had taken place around the towns of Stung and Chikreng in central Kompong Thom province since Tuesday, the official said.

"Our presence there is bothersome for them because it cuts the road," he said.

Phnom Penh has accused the guerrillas of mounting attacks and artillery bombardments in the western provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap and Banteay-Mechey as well as in coastal Kampot.

Mrs. Frazier, 67, embraced the 5-foot-4-inch (1.6-metre) queen, 65, during a tour of a low-cost housing project Wednesday.

"Dodge City hug," said the Daily Telegraph. Another newspaper, Today, told the story under the headline, "Well hello there, Queenie."

The coverage reflected the contrast with the British practice confining physical contact with royalty to limp handshakes.

"I thought the pictures were very touching," Hugo Vickers, a writer on royalty, said in an interview with Britain's Sky Television Network. "I think that will be one of the pictures which probably lasts historically in the queen's reign."

The hug followed a flood of stories in Britain on the first day of the visit when President George Bush forgot to activate a platform to raise the queen above the microphones he'd used for his welcome speech.

"Two questions are occupying those Americans interested in the royal visit," said the Independent, a highbrow London newspaper in its story from Washington.

Bear hug steals the royal Washington show

LONDON (AP) — Britons are watching the formal ceremonies of Queen Elizabeth II's U.S. tour — but the star of the show by Thursday was the Washington great-grandmother who gave the British monarch a big hug.

"The queen was stunned when she was grabbed in a rib-crunching bear hug by a 16-stone (224-pounds) great-grandmother," said London's 3-million circulation Daily Mirror under the photograph of the queen smiling a shade fixedly in Alice Frazier's arms.

"At first she couldn't hide her shock but a smile soon broke out on her face," the paper said.

Newspapers mixed stories and photos of the incident with stories about the prospects of Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of U.S. forces in the Gulf war, for getting a knighthood. Buckingham Palace refused Thursday to confirm or deny Schwarzkopf's prospects.

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Blast destroys room at Soviet opposition offices

MOSCOW (R) — An explosion ripped through a room at the headquarters of the powerful opposition group Democratic Russia overnight, destroying documents but causing no casualties, an official for the movement said Friday.

"We are treating this as a terrorist act," he said, adding that no one had yet claimed responsibility.

Democratic Russia, which claims about 1.3 million members, is an umbrella group which helped catapult populist Russian leader Boris Yeltsin to power and is now backing his candidacy for the executive presidency of the republic.

The official said the blast severely damaged one of the group's document rooms late Thursday night. But thousands of signa-

tures collected in support of Yeltsin's candidacy were stored elsewhere and had not been affected.

Aides to Yeltsin were not immediately available for comment.

Yeltsin is widely expected to win the June 12 election for the new post of president, which will give him a powerful base from which to challenge Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev for control of his republic.

There are several other candidates for the post, but Yeltsin's main rival is expected to be former Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, who resigned in January after a heart attack.

Current Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov conceded Thursday that Ryzhkov was unlikely to win the poll, the first direct election of a top Soviet leader since the October Revolution of 1917.

Angola truce violations 'will not destroy peace'

LUANDA (R) — Angolan authorities blamed UNITA rebels for three attacks, just hours after a de facto ceasefire in the 16-year Angolan war came into force.

But UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi denied that his fighters had violated the truce.

The government remained confident that the war would end as agreed at the end of the month.

"This will not disrupt the peace accords. This time we really are certain of peace," Deputy Defence Minister General Antonio Dos Santos Franco told Reuters.

Major Americo Valente, a spokesman for the Angolan Armed Forces General Staff, told journalists at a briefing in Luanda:

"No ceasefire has been signed yet, so the period between ... May 16 and May 31 when the peace accords are due to be signed should be viewed as a period of truce under the general undertakings of the agreement."

He said there had been three truce violations Thursday by rebels of UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

They had occupied Monte Belo in Benguela province, attacked government troops positions 32 kilometres outside Bailundo in central Huambo province and

bombarded another government position near Luena in eastern Moxico province.

But Savimbi, denying his men had violated the truce, told a news conference in Brussels: "There have not been bombardments ... everybody is complying with instructions."

For the first time since April Luena itself was quiet Thursday, although Valente said the general staff was concerned about UNITA troop movements on its outskirts and in the area of Caculama in the northern province of Malange.

"Under the terms of the undertakings, there should not be troop movements within a radius of 10 kilometres of the other side's positions," said Valente.

He added that the UNITA claim that Monte Belo had already been in their hands and was attacked by government soldiers was "simply not true."

Foreign correspondents who accompanied government forces in Luena this week reported heavy UNITA artillery fire.

Officials said the process of installing a lasting peace in Angola had only just begun.

"The next two weeks will serve as an introduction to the idea that the war is over," Deputy Information Minister Joao Miranda said.

COLUMN

Saudi buys one of world's largest sapphires

GENEVA (AP) — The largest sapphire ever put on auction was purchased by a Saudi businessman for 2.3 million, more than twice the pre-sale estimate. The cushion-shaped sapphire weighing a massive 337.6 carats and set in a diamond and platinum mount in 1910 — was featured at a Christie's jewellery sale in Geneva last week.

The purchaser, Sheikh Ahmad Hassan Fathi, owner of one of the leading Jeddah department stores, was quoted by the auctioneers as saying he wanted to sell this "magnificent jewel in my country."

The previous owner was not identified. Christie's spokeswoman Pauline Schaefer said that only four larger sapphires are known to exist, all in museums. They include the 536-carat "Star of India" in the American Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. and the 548-carat gem known as "Peter the Great's Nose," in the Green Vault of Dresden.

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MELBOURNE (AP) — A 6-year-old girl fell 18 stories from her family's apartment but suffered only a broken thigh and